

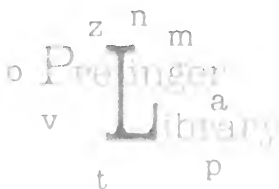




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WANDERINGS IN  
ANGLO-SAXON  
BRITAIN

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*Photo: Harold Baker, Birmingham.*

The Crypt at Repton.  
(p. 227)

# WANDERINGS IN ANGLO-SAXON BRITAIN

BY  
ARTHUR WEIGALL



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## PREFACE

LET me say at the outset that my knowledge of the period dealt with in these pages is that of a student rather than of an expert. Impelled by the extraordinary interest of the subject, I have made a short, intensive, and eager study of the Anglo-Saxon epoch, visiting and examining all the most important buildings and other remains *in situ*, as well as the main collections in museums, and reading through a great many books and scientific papers; but I make no claim to a knowledge greater than that which may be obtained in this manner by anyone who has been trained in historical and archæological research.

Much of the matter contained in the following chapters was published as a series of articles in the *Daily Mail* during the winter of 1926–1927. These followed a series which appeared in the previous summer, and is now published in book form under the title *Wanderings in Roman Britain*.

My purpose has been to place before the reader an outline of the history of these early periods, illustrated by descriptions of actual ruins, objects, and other remains now to be seen in various parts of the country, so that there may be brought home to him the wealth of the material available for the reconstruction of the story of the beginnings of our race, and he may realize both the interest and

the extent of the record so unaccountably neglected in our ordinary history books.

As the object of this book may be described as a patriotic one, an incitement, that is to say, to my countrymen to make themselves acquainted with the enthralling story of our own land and our own people, I have taken the utmost pains to write these chapters in simple language, and to prevent any intrusion either of a technical phraseology or even of a scholastic atmosphere ; and I may perhaps be permitted to remind the erudite reader that that has been no easy task to one who has passed so much of his life in the study and pursuit of practical archæology. Every science has its jargon, which becomes almost second nature to its professors ; and every scholar must wish to substantiate his assertions by arguments tedious to the lay reader, and by copious notes and references. Yet I am convinced that the art of simple explanation and easy presentation is one which should be cultivated by the antiquarian, for to-day he has a public anxious to learn the results of research, yet most wary of the company of Professor Dryasdust.

## CHAPTER I

### THE SURVIVAL OF THE BRITISH RACE

SOME of my readers may have seen the book of mine entitled *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, wherein I described the chief Roman-British ruins and remains in the country, and sketched the history of that epoch down to the collapse of the Roman power. In the present volume I am going to carry the story onwards, and give an account of the main relics of the Anglo-Saxon age which covers the period from about the Sixth to the Eleventh Century.

The question may be asked, perhaps, why I still name our country "Britain," although these pages deal with the epoch in which the Anglo-Saxons came into full and permanent possession only of those parts of the island now called "England"; but I have followed the early historians and chroniclers, such as Bede who wrote his famous history in 731 A.D., and these authors generally speak of "Britain" and of "the English nation in Britain," not of "England" (Angle-land). Moreover, I shall have to write of Scotland and Wales, as well as of England; and although the title "Anglo-Saxon Britain" does not mean to suggest that those two countries, which were part of Britain, were ever Anglo-Saxon possessions, it is intended to indicate that they

were at certain periods tributary to the Anglo-Saxons, and that the Anglo-Saxon age in England constituted an epoch also in Scotland and Wales which cannot be better named.

“ Britain ” was then the general name for the three realms—England, Scotland and Wales, while we have the authority of Bede for speaking of the Irish also as Britons ; and in modern times when these nations are rapidly being welded by intercommunication and intermarriage into one people, and share alike in the worldwide heritage of the British Empire, it is well to remind ourselves of the high and ancient authority we have for applying the name to all four countries.

In the previous volume, to which I have just referred, I emphasized the fact that in English veins to-day there still flows the blood of the ancient British and of the heterogeneous Romans with whom they had intermarried during that long period of 400 years in which our country was the permanent home of a great Roman army and a vast population of civilians and colonists from across the sea. The Roman soldiers stationed in Britain were drawn from such races as the Germans, Gauls, Belgians, Dutch, Spaniards, Portuguese, Greeks, Thracians, Rumanians, Hungarians, Dalmatians, North Africans, and so forth ; and these men freely intermarried with the British who were also Roman citizens, all being members of the wide confederacy of different races which comprised the Empire. Soldiers and civilians lived on in or near the towns where their active life had been spent, and literally peopled whole areas with the descendants of their mixed marriages ;

and thus, though in certain regions, especially in the west, the British blood remained fairly pure, in other parts it was astonishingly mixed, and indeed could be described as an almost complete blend of all the white races. I pointed out, also, that our Anglo-Saxon forefathers who invaded and took possession of a great part of the island, did not entirely exterminate or drive out this earlier stock, as is generally stated in our school books, but enslaved a large portion of it and at length absorbed it by intermarriage, except in Wales and certain other parts of the west, where the Celtic blood remained unblended.

Several stout English readers have taken me to task on this point, and in letters to me have expressed their contempt for both the pure British and the Roman-British, terming them a cowardly people who were ignominiously expelled or annihilated by the Anglo-Saxons, and accusing me of foisting upon our English race an ancestry which was ignoble and shameful. In the present volume, therefore, I must, at the outset, clear this matter up as briefly as I can.

In the first place I must point out that the British or Roman-British people who were displaced by the Anglo-Saxons were no cowards, but went down fighting gloriously after putting up so sturdy a resistance to the invaders that the latter never conquered more than a certain part of Britain, and took 200 years and more to do even that. Indeed, as late as 633 A.D. our British forefathers very nearly succeeded in driving out our English forefathers; and, so far as a fighting spirit is concerned, we ought to be proud to have

the blood of both nations in our veins. After all, the defeat of the British by the Anglo-Saxons was no more shameful than the defeat of the Anglo-Saxons by the Danes and Normans.

The idea that the earlier race was exterminated by the Anglo-Saxons was prevalent in the 'seventies, and was popularly propagated by the great historian J. R. Green ; but it has now been abandoned by scholars, and I need only refer the reader to one of the greatest living authorities on the subject, Mr. Reginald Smith of the British Museum, who writes that " the view now generally taken is that the Romanized Briton was suffered to remain in the occupied regions in a subordinate class."

As a matter of fact the Eighth Century historian, Bede, makes this quite clear ; for he states that in his time the island of Britain was inhabited by five nations, the Anglo-Saxons, the Picts and Scots in the north, the Britons and the Latins, by whom he must mean the descendants of the Romans rather than the Roman missionaries and other later settlers, for he says that the Latin tongue which they spoke was coming back into use by means of the reading of the Scriptures. He says, also, that many of the British " submitted themselves to the enemy and passed into servitude," and elsewhere he states that the invaders "*either* drove the British clean out *or* made them tributary," while in the Seventh Century, he tells us, many of the Britons in the conquered areas " recovered their liberty."

In the year 693 the West Saxon King Ine drew up a code of laws in which provision is made for



the considerable population of British blood living in his realms, some of whom were court officials and belonged to the royal circle ; and in the code of the Kentish King Aethelbert there seems to be a reference to a similar British population ; while in the Kingdom of Mercia, which the invaders founded in the Midlands, the relations between the newcomers and the old British stock were so friendly that the men of both races fought side by side against the Angles in the north. Indeed, as Isaac Taylor and others have pointed out, there is much evidence to show that the bulk of the population both of Mercia and Wessex remained Celtic.

As late as 626 we find an independent British state existing around Leeds, in the midst of the invaders' realms, and it is obvious that it could only have survived there on sufferance ; and even in the time of the Danes we read of Ely and the Fens being infested with British robber bands. Ceadwalla, King of the West Saxons in 685, bears a British name, suggesting that he had British blood in his veins through the female line ; and his brother's name, Mul, is some confirmation of this, for it means " Half-breed." In the early Seventh Century we find the Angles and British on such good terms that Edwin, the future Anglian King, was able to live as a youth at the British court ; while Oswald, his successor, and other English kings, employed Celtic bishops who could not always speak English. William of Malmesbury tells us that as late as the reign of Aethelstan in the Tenth Century the British shared the possession of Exeter with the English, which can only mean

that many another town of the south-west had a similar mixed population. In the reign of Ecgfrith, too, in 680, we read of Cartmel in Furness being given to the monastery of Lindisfarne "with all the Britons thereon"; while in the case of the Lowlands of Scotland, although this area was part of the English Kingdom of Northumbria, there are practically no Anglo-Saxon remains to be found, and no indication of the displacement of the earlier population.



Remains of a Roman Road, Blackstone Edge.

Generally speaking it seems that whenever the Anglo-Saxons succeeded in defeating the British and capturing any area of territory from them, they enslaved those of the vanquished race who were not killed or who had not escaped, and brought

them back to work on the lands from which they had been ousted. Here for some generations they lived in captivity, while many of the British women doubtless bore children to their Anglo-Saxon masters, as is implied by Gildas, who, speaking of the arrival of later hordes of the invaders, says that "they sailed over and joined themselves to their bastard-born comrades." In the end, however, the distinction between the two races faded away, and long before the Norman conquest they had become one people, except in the northern half of Scotland, in Wales, and in the extreme south-west and north-west of England, where the old stock had remained unconquered and unmixed.

The word "Welsh," by the way, simply means "foreigners." "Wales" is the "land of the foreigners"; and Cornwall, originally Corn-Wales (as in the French Cornouailles) means the *Corn*, or *horn*, or promontory, inhabited by these foreigners.

In that part of our island now called England most of the villages have Anglo-Saxon and not British names, for the invaders had seized the agricultural lands and had settled their families upon them; but a great number of the cities retained their British or Roman names, for here there were large groups of the earlier population which survived the conquest. The Anglo-Saxon language at length replaced the British and Latin tongues spoken by the vanquished race in England; but, especially amongst the captive women, many of the old British words survived to become part of our present speech, and in the vocabulary of

husbandry a good number of British terms remain in use.\*

In this first chapter I want to lay stress upon the fact of the amalgamation of the two races in England, because our school books have so incorrectly spread the belief that the English have no relation to the British, and we have been credited with a purely Germanic ancestry. Actually, however, we are a blend of the two races; and thus while our English ancestry takes us back only 1,500 years or so to the darkness of a rather stormy life in Denmark, Schleswig, and along the neighbouring German coast, our British blood, apart from the "Roman" strain, carries us right back into the four centuries of our connection with Rome, and thence back for at least another 1500 years of more or less civilized life in Britain, and links us at length with the men who built Stonehenge.

As descendants of the British we have at least 3,500 years of civilization in our own land behind us; † but though our English history covers less than half that period it, too, presents, even in its early phases, a very creditable tale. The conditions of life in England in early Anglo-Saxon times were at any rate far superior to those in France under the contemporary Merovingians.

Thus, if my purpose is achieved, I shall put forward in these pages a picture of our forefathers' history which, on the whole, will give us cause for much pride of race, and which, while justifying our faith in the genius of the English people, will

\* *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 324.

† *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 21 ff.

not obscure the fact, too little known, that we to-day use by ancestral right as well as for political convenience that wider epithet—"British"—in describing ourselves and the men of our race throughout the world.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FIRST ARRIVAL OF THE INVADERS

*(Pegwell Bay, Ebbsfleet, Richborough Castle, Aylesford,  
and other places in Kent).*

AT the time when the east and south coasts of Britain first began seriously to be invaded by our forefathers from across the North Sea, our country was a very well-behaved and orderly part of the Roman Empire; and our highly cultured British forefathers, who were Christians and who were very proud of being Roman citizens, contemptuously regarded the invaders both as heathens, which they certainly were, and as savages, which as certainly they were not.

The British upper classes in those days were thoroughly Romanized, were partly of mixed "Roman" blood, and spoke the Latin tongue; and throughout the country there was that same degree of civilization, prosperity and comfort, which was to be found in other parts of the Empire. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that they regarded the new-comers as barbarians, especially as the actual invasions were preceded by piratical raids of a freebooting character. A Roman poet described these new enemies as "fierce beyond other foes, and cunning as they are fierce: the sea their school of war, and the storm their friend"; and the contemporary British writer,

Gildas, calls them "cubs from the lair of a barbarian lioness."

This Gildas is largely responsible for the spreading of the idea that the invaders were a barbarous people. He speaks of "the fierce and impious Saxons, a race hateful both to God and man"; and he describes in terrible words the slaughter they perpetrated, he being their bitter enemy. Nevertheless, the weapons, utensils, jewellery, and other objects left by the first Anglo-Saxon settlers prove beyond doubt that they were a people of high culture; and their early conversion to Christianity, which was completed without the martyrdom of a single missionary, and the beauty of the lives of many of their first princes and holy men, show that they were very far from being savages.

The piratical raids which preceded the main migrations began as early as the last years of the Third Century A.D.; and by the year 368 they had become so frequent and so audacious that a great Roman General, Theodosius, was sent to Britain with a large army to meet the menace, and succeeded in driving the raiders back across the sea. All along the coast from Norfolk to the Solent there were now great forts, where troops were stationed to guard the shores against attack—you may see them still standing at Yarmouth, Richborough, Pevensey, Portsmouth, and elsewhere;\* and by the beginning of the Fifth Century the famous Second Legion, Augusta, which was recruited on the Rhine, had been transferred from South Wales to Kent, while a mixed collection

\* *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 194 ff.

of Belgians, Gauls, Dalmatians, and other auxiliary forces was spread along the menaced coast, it being the Roman custom to garrison each province of the Empire with regiments from another province, the British troops, therefore, being then stationed for the most part abroad.

It is very possible that a certain number of "Saxons" had already settled in East Anglia in the Fourth Century, or even in the Third; for in Suffolk and Essex there is a smaller proportion of Celtic or British place-names than in any other part of the country, which suggests a longer foreign occupation of those parts. Moreover, we have the curious fact that around Boulogne and in certain other areas of the French coast there are many pure Saxon place-names to be found, such as Bazingham, Ballingham, Erringham, and Masinghen, corresponding to the Anglo-Saxon place-names Bassingham, Ballingham, Erringham, and Massingham in England; and as no such Saxon settlement in France is known to history, the inference is that it took place in very early times, which leads one to suppose that certain settlements in England are also of early date.

Be this as it may, at last there came the days when the Roman armies began to be withdrawn from Britain to fight the battles of rival Emperors on the Continent, and to meet the menace to Rome itself; and when the raiders discovered that the defence of the coast had thus been weakened, they renewed their onslaughts on a larger scale. At the same time the country was attacked by tribes from beyond the great wall



of Hadrian which ran across Cumberland and Northumberland from sea to sea, and by piratical bands from Ireland; and thus the

British people had to organize themselves to meet invasion on all sides without the aid of Rome.

The tale which the history of this period has to tell is one of the long drawn-out struggle of the Romanised Britons to beat off these attacks, to uphold their comfortable civilization and their time-honoured institutions, and to maintain themselves as a part of the crumbling Roman Empire; and since we to-day are descended from both defenders and attackers, we may watch the ding-dong fight with divided interests, and may freely give credit to both sides for the bravery and persistence they displayed.

The lands from



Jewellery from Faversham and Wingham, Kent.

which the Germanic invaders came lay along those sea-girt shores which pass from Denmark through Schleswig to the Netherlands. To the Romans these tribes had long been known as "Saxons," but actually they belonged to three nations—the Jutes in the north, the Angles in the middle, and the Saxons in the south, while it seems likely that a fourth people, the Frisians from the neighbourhood of Holland, were also involved. Of these peoples the Angles, or English, appear to have been the most powerful; and the comparatively modern term "Anglo-Saxon" may be said to have been designed to indicate that while they all belonged to the tribes loosely described as Saxons, the Anglian element played the most important part in the movement.

The first definitely known group of these people to come to Britain not as raiders but as adventurers prepared if necessary to stay, consisted of three shiploads of Jutes who are said to have been exiled from their own country, and, indeed, seem to have been living for some time near the mouth of the Rhine, and who, under the leadership of two brothers, Hengist and Horsa, arrived out of the blue about the year 450 A.D., when Valentinianus III was Emperor. They landed in Pegwell Bay, Kent, at the spot called in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Ypwinesfleot, and now named Ebbsfleet; but the sea since then has receded, and between that place and the present beach there is a mile's breadth of reclaimed land across which runs the main road from Sandwich to Ramsgate.

Here in those days, there was a navigable waterway cutting right through to the estuary of

the Thames, and at high tide the water completely separated the rising ground of Thanet (where now stand Westgate, Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate) from the mainland of Kent. Away to the left, across this channel, or across the narrow fairway and the broad mud-flats left there when the tide ebbed, stood the Roman fortress of Rutupiae upon a sandy hillock. The ruins of this stronghold, now called Richborough Castle, are still to be seen;\* but in the days when those three ships grounded upon Ebbsfleet beach, the mighty walls towered up as a landmark for miles around, and the officer commanding the British troops stationed therein must soon have sent over to ascertain the newcomers' business.



An Early Anglo-Saxon Buckle  
from Smithfield, London.

The outcome is well known. Tradition has it that Hengist and Horsa offered their services to King Vortigern, who was a vassal of Rome and was the chief man in Britain at the time, and made a bargain with him by which they were to receive payment and land to live on in Thanet, and in return were to fight for him against all other invaders. Soon these Jutish adventurers sent over the sea for their wives and families, and presently numerous shiploads of them arrived. It was only twenty years or so since the Second

\* *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 173.

Legion had been withdrawn from Kent to the Continent; and as this famous force had been recruited from the Rhine, Vortigern may well have thought that he was fortunate to have been able to replace them by men of much the same breed. With this second company came Hengist's daughter, whose beauty so attracted the British ruler that he married her, after which, it may be supposed, her father had considerable influence at court.

A few years later, probably about 455 A.D., Hengist quarrelled with Vortigern, and his whole force swarmed out of Thanet into Kent, no doubt capturing the fortress of Rutupiae at the outset. The British were taken by surprise; and the invaders, who seem to have contemplated the capture of all East Kent, had reached the Medway, some 45 miles from Thanet, before any real resistance was offered. Here, however, a pitched battle was fought at the old Roman ford over the river, three miles from Maidstone, where now stands the picturesque little town of Aylesford and its Fourteenth Century bridge.

The struggle seems to have ended in a British victory, for though Categirn, the son of Vortigern, was killed on the one side, Horsa perished on the other; and Hengist was obliged to march his army back towards Thanet. At a spot on the sea-coast, described as the place of the Inscribed Stone, doubtless because there was here a large Roman inscription, and possibly represented by the modern Stonar, near Deal, he was again defeated, and retired to Thanet.

Two years afterwards, in 457, he made a more

successful invasion of the Kentish mainland, and before his death, some 30 years later, he had gradually overrun the greater part of the county of Kent, and had there established an undisputed Jutish realm of which he himself was ruler, his capital being at Durovernum, renamed Cantwara-byrig, "the city of the men of Kent," now called Canterbury. The opposing troops had been driven back to the neighbourhood of London; but it seems that large numbers of the original Cantii, that is to say the British tribe whose name is still preserved in the words Kent, Canterbury, etc., were suffered to remain on their lands, for reference seems to be made to them in an early Kentish code of laws, and to this day the people of Romney Marsh, the Weald, and certain parts of the south coast of the county, reveal a pure British strain, whilst much of the pottery found in the invaders' graves in Kent can be seen to have been made in the succeeding generations by Roman-British workmen.

Such was the course of the first of the Germanic settlements in Britain; and in the next chapter I will speak of the conquest of other parts of our island.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE ANGLO-SAXON CONQUEST

AS recorded in the previous chapter, the county of Kent was the first part of Britain to fall into the hands of the invaders from across the North Sea; its conquest by the Jutes being apparently complete at the death of Hengist in 488. He, however, does not seem to have ruled as an actual king, for the Kentish royal house was known as that of the Oiscings, and was named after Oisc who was a son or grandson of Hengist. The great-grandson of Oisc, by the way, was Aethelbert I, who reigned over Kent from 560 to 616; and it was he who welcomed St. Augustine on his coming to Britain in 597, and was baptised by him into the Christian faith, as I shall relate in another chapter.

So much for Kent. Meanwhile, in 477, a band of adventurers—Saxons this time, not Jutes—under their chieftain, Aella, established themselves on the low-lying headland of Selsey Bill, or rather on that part of it which has now disappeared under the encroaching sea, and, marching inland, captured the *ceaster*, or fortified city, of Regnum, which was renamed after Aella's son Cissa, whence its present name, Chichester, is derived. For the next dozen years or so these Saxons worked their way slowly eastwards along the coast, past the

later towns of Bognor, Worthing, Brighton, and Eastbourne; and at last, in 490, they stormed and captured the Roman-British fortress of Anderida or Andriada, the Pevensey Castle of to-day, between Eastbourne and Bexhill, and disgraced themselves by putting to the sword the heroic garrison which had held out so long against Jutes and Saxons.

It does not seem that the little kingdom they thus created extended for the present much further inland than the line of the South Downs, but it formed the foundation of the county of Sussex, a name which signifies the South Saxons' land.

Meanwhile, a horde of Jutes, following the example of their kinsmen who had settled in Kent, swarmed into the Isle of Wight, the ancient Vectis, and established themselves also on the shores of the mainland, across the Solent and Spithead, apparently capturing the Roman-British fortress of Portus Adurni, now Porchester Castle, behind Portsmouth. These people were known as the Meonwaras, and the name still survives in the villages of Meonstoke and East and West Meon, a dozen miles or more inland from Portsmouth.

West of this little state, another group of Saxons,



Bronze-Gilt Brooch, from Chessel Down, Isle of Wight.

arriving probably just before 500, founded the afterwards famous Kingdom of Wessex, that is to say the land of the West Saxons. It is thought that the traditional founders of this realm, Cerdic and his son Cynric, are mythical, and that the first historical king of these West Saxons was Ceawlin, who began his reign in 560 ; but, be this as it may, the traditional date of Cerdic's arrival, 495, may be accepted as approximately that of their original invasion, and I may add that they seem to have belonged to several different tribes, for they are sometimes called *Gewissae*, which means "allies" or "confederates." The present King, George V, by the way, is 45th in descent from Ceawlin.

Encouraged by the success of their countrymen in this southern part of Britain, further multitudes of Saxons attacked the east coast north of the estuary of the Thames, across the water from the Jutish territory of Kent ; and by about 500 they seem to have taken possession of a great part of the later county of Essex, a name which means the land of the East Saxons. It is true that Aescwin, the first king of this new realm, is stated to have begun his reign only in 527 ; but there is reason to suppose that the invasion of this area must have taken place a generation earlier than that.

These Saxons must have captured the Roman-British fortress of Othona, the ruins of which are still to be seen at Bradwell-on-Sea, 16 miles north-east of Southend, and the city of Camulodunum (Colchester) was probably in their hands ; but London and its neighbourhood seem still to have been held by the British.



So far, all the invaders had come over from the old Saxon lands between the mouths of the Rhine and the Elbe, for, as I said in the previous chapter, the Jutes who captured Kent and the Isle of Wight seem to have been living in the Netherlands, near the Rhine, in exile from their original home in Jutland. But now the tales of the conquest of the rich lands of Britain had spread northwards into Schleswig, where the Angles lived; and these people began to try their luck across the sea.

In two groups they landed on that great headland called after them East Anglia, the northern section establishing the state known as that of the North Folk, now called Norfolk, and the southern section peopling the territory named after them the land of the South Folk, or Suffolk. This was the country of the British tribe of the Iceni, of whom Boadicea had once been queen; and in it were three great fortresses—Branodunum (Brancaaster) in the north, Felixstowe in the south, the ancient name of which is not known, and Gariannonum between these two, the ruins of which can still be seen near Yarmouth.\* All these must have passed into the hands of the invaders, and the British must have been driven back to a line many miles from the coast.

Meanwhile, further bands of Angles had been endeavouring to gain a footing on the coasts of Northumberland, Durham and Yorkshire; and here two states were presently founded, that in the north being called Bernicia, and the other, south of the Tees, being named Deira; but it was

\* *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 58.

not until many years later that they became actual kingdoms. Yet other Angles soon penetrated into Lincolnshire, and founded a state now known as Lindsey, while others spread inland and established the Kingdom of Mercia, ("Borderland" or "Marches"), which gradually pushed westward into what we now call the Midlands, but for the present was confined to the eastern side of the country.

By the beginning of the Sixth Century the British had been fighting these invaders more or less continuously for nearly 50 years, and they had lost to them all the north-east coast-line, and the "hinderland" at certain points, the main parts of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, and the southern parts of Sussex and Hampshire; and though this length of time shows that the invasion was no walk-over, as is generally supposed, we may assume that the British armies were much disheartened.

Then, suddenly, there was a revival. A great Roman-British leader arose, probably none other than Artorius, the King Arthur of our legends; and under his generalship twelve battles are said to have been fought with the invaders. The last of these was that of Mons Badonis or Badonicus, an unidentified place, apparently in Somerset, whither the West Saxons had made a raiding incursion. This engagement is to be dated either to the year 500 or to 516, more probably the latter, and it resulted in an overwhelming victory for the British. The Saxons were slaughtered by the thousand, and those who escaped deemed themselves fortunate to be able to cling on to the bare

sea-coast and not to be driven altogether out of the country.

The British man of letters, Gildas, writing in 545, states that up till that year the invaders had not captured any territory from the defenders since the battle of Mons Badonis ; but the respite did not last very long, and by 550 or so the advance began again.

The East Saxons, reinforced by hosts of new immigrants, overwhelmed London and pushed up the Thames Valley, where the state of the Middle Saxons (Middlesex) was founded ; the South Saxons crossed the South Downs and captured all Sussex ; and the West Saxons passed up into Wiltshire and Hampshire, absorbing the Jutish settlers in and opposite the Isle of Wight, and laying the British population of Dorset under tribute. In the north, too, the Angles pushed inland, and Bernicia rose to great importance under its first King, Ida, whose accession is dated to some time just before 550. The fighting with the British was here desperate, and at one time the Angles were very nearly driven into the sea. Meanwhile, Mercia was ever pushing westwards into the heart of the Midlands.

Such was the first phase of the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain ; and by about the year 570, when what may be called the second phase begins, the warfare had lasted for 120 years—four whole generations—and the British were then in control of about three quarters of the island, while in the conquered quarter as many of them as had voluntarily remained or had been captured, had become the slaves of the victors.

In the case of the Angles, or English, there had been a complete migration of the whole race—men, women, and children—from Schleswig to the north-eastern side of Britain; and Bede states that in his time (the Eighth Century) the former country still remained deserted and uninhabited. But in the case of the Saxons, the migration was not so wholesale: it had at first more the nature of a military invasion and occupation; and hence one may suppose that the south of England to-day has preserved a stronger British strain than has the north-east.



Clasps from Taplow, Bucks.

The second phase of the invasion was introduced by an advance of the West Saxons into the regions north of the Thames in 571; and this was followed by a push towards the Bristol Channel when, somewhere about 580, a great battle was fought at Dirham, a little village some ten miles east of Bristol, in which the British leader, Candidanus,

whom one may call the last of the Romans, was slain, and his army utterly routed. The cities of Bath, Cirencester, and Gloucester fell to the Saxons; and soon the south-western counties had passed out of British control.

Meanwhile the whole of the north-western side of Britain from Glasgow down to Warwick, constituted a British state known as Strathclyde, which lay parallel with the eastern regions held by the Angles; but in 603 Aethelfrith, the Anglian King of Northumbria, captured Chester, and drove a wedge into the British territories, separating Wales from Lancashire and the north. In 633, however, Penda, King of Mercia, the new Saxon state formed in the Midlands, joined forces with the British under Cadwallon, and, defeating the Angles of Northumbria, at Hatfield, near Doncaster, pushed them back to the east coast; but in the following year Cadwallon was defeated and killed, and soon the British Kingdom of Strathclyde had lost all its territory south of Westmorland.

Thus, at the end of the Seventh Century, of all England only Cumberland and Westmorland in the north, and Cornwall and a part of Devon in the south, were purely British. These areas, together with all Wales, remained unconquered, but the rest of England was in Anglo-Saxon hands; and at this juncture, after nearly 200 years of warfare, we may leave the long and complicated story of the conquest, and turn our attention to various incidents and events connected with particular parts of the country where actual remains of this epoch are still to be seen.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANGLO-SAXON CIVILIZATION

**I**N the foregoing chapters I have given a brief account of the conquest of the main part of the later England by the Anglo-Saxon invaders ; and now I must speak of the Anglo-Saxon antiquities which are to be seen in our museums, though my selection must be limited. There is a vast mass of material in the country, which throws a flood of light on the manners and customs of these early ancestors of ours ; but here I can do no more than call attention to a few of the more interesting objects which have survived.

Let me say at once that the reason why we have hardly any traces of Anglo-Saxon dwellings left to us, although, as will be seen later, there are scores of examples of church buildings dating in some cases from the earliest years after the conversion of the newcomers to Christianity, is that the houses were generally made of wood and have therefore disappeared. The invaders did not like the brick or stone-built mansions of Roman times which they found on their arrival in Britain ; they seem to have thought them less cheerful than their own stout wooden homes which were ornamented with rich carving and bright paint, not unlike those to be seen in Scandinavia at the present day. It was not that the newcomers were savages, as is generally

supposed, unable to do more than gape at the splendour they had wrecked : it seems rather that, in general, they were quite able to make use of such things as were needful to them, and only consigned to limbo those that were not.

Being a hardy people, inured to the cold, they probably regarded the central-heating arrangements they found in all the Roman villas as unhealthy ; but it was not long before they adopted the use of glass in their windows. They appreciated the baths in some cases, for Bede speaks of the hot natural springs at Bath and elsewhere, and says that they are “ proper for all ages and sexes, and are arranged accordingly.” The Roman temples were already in ruins, for Britain was a Christian country at the time of the invasion ; but the churches which had taken their place were admired and were sometimes converted into shrines for their own gods, as we find in the case of St. Pancras’ Church at Canterbury, and later were to some extent copied by their own builders after they had adopted Christianity as their religion.

Some of the Roman forts, such as Richborough Castle, were taken over and garrisoned ; but in other cases they preferred to use earthworks, as their fathers had done, and could not bother to erect walls of stone, especially as most of their men were farmers or soldiers pure and simple, and were not trained, like the Roman legionaries, to turn their hand to other work such as wall-building.

They appreciated the fine Roman roads, however, and we shall presently read of Edwin of Northumbria repairing them, and cleaning up

the drinking-fountains. When they invaded Britain they used to grind their corn in small querns ; but soon they adopted the Roman water-worked mills, and probably as early as 833 they were using windmills.

In regard to sculpture and ornamental stonework they had little to learn from the Roman-British, and their memorial crosses, of which I shall speak



Specimens of Anglo-Saxon Glass.

later, display better workmanship, on the whole, than that found on the monuments of the late Empire in Britain.

Their jewellery, personal ornaments, plate,



metal-work, glass vessels, and so forth were first-rate, and there was no need to copy Roman designs. Their clothing was almost as fine as, and often more gorgeous than, that of the Roman-Britons whom they conquered ; and their weapons were quite as good.

Thus, we need not think of our English forefathers as being too primitive to appreciate the civilization they found in Britain : the actual fact is that they had their own civilization, which, in most respects, was adequate to their needs and was much preferred by them ; but where a Roman device or custom was better than their own they were not slow to adopt it. Who shall say that a bejewelled Anglo-Saxon nobleman, sumptuously clothed, and seated at table in his richly carved and painted wooden hall, with silver plate and glass goblets before him, had anything very important to his comfort to learn from Rome ? The civilization of Roman Britain did not fall into ruins because a horde of capering savages, too ignorant to make use of it, trampled it underfoot, but because the newcomers had their own ideas and their own culture which took its place.

Go to the British Museum, the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, or to some other of the great collections, and you will see exquisite jewellery and all manner of rich articles found in Anglo-Saxon graves ; and as the custom of burying such objects with the dead almost entirely ceased after they had adopted Christianity, most of these things belong to the early years after the invasion.

In the British Museum there is a group of objects found in a grave at Broomfield, Essex, and amongst

these there are a fine sword, a shield, a bronze pan, two wooden buckets with iron mounts, an iron cup on a four-footed stem, an iron cauldron, two vases of blue glass, some splendid jewellery, and many other things, all of excellent workmanship, and showing a state of civilization amongst the invaders little inferior to that of the Roman-British.

There, too, you will see the contents of a tomb found at Taplow, amongst which are beautiful



A Bronze Bowl from Taplow, Bucks.

glass goblets, a superb drinking horn mounted in bronze-gilt, a large bronze bowl upon a stand, a splendid gold buckle set with garnets, a pair of bronze gilt clasps, two spears, a sword in a wooden scabbard, fragments of two shields, an iron

knife, a wooden bucket framed with iron, a tub, some elaborate glass cups, four drinking horns, one with silver-gilt mounts, thirty draughtsmen, and several other articles.

Here, also, are many beautiful objects from a cemetery on Chessel Down in the Isle of Wight; and it is interesting to notice that the pottery found in these graves is obviously Roman-British, indicating that the potteries continued to be worked by some section of the British population which had survived the invasion. Multitudes of

objects from other sites which have been excavated are exhibited, including hundreds of rich brooches, pins, buckles, and other personal ornaments ; and I may refer to the objects from a big cemetery at Kempston in Bedfordshire, which include a group of toilet articles, jewellery, and over one hundred glass and amber beads from the grave of a woman.

In the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford there are large collections of objects from Faversham and Chatham Lines in Kent, Icklingham in Suffolk, Brighthampton and Wheatley in Oxfordshire, Long Wittenham in Berkshire, and other places where important excavations have been conducted ; and these again show what very excellent work the early Anglo-Saxon craftsmen could do. The discoveries throughout the country are endless, however, and I have no space even to mention the names of the more important sites.

In the following chapters I shall endeavour to show what a great deal of material there is in the country by which we can build up the story of the Anglo-Saxon age ; and I shall try to emphasize the high state of civilization revealed by this story. In spite of wars and tumults, a remarkable and gradually increasing refinement of mind is to be observed in these early ancestors of ours, contrasting them very favourably with their contemporaries on the Continent. There is a curious sweetness and gentleness in the characters of men of whom I am going to speak, such as Oswald of Northumbria, Alfred of Wessex, and others ; and we cannot fail to think of them as *gentlemen* in the best sense of the word.

But I will begin with a question. Is this

refinement of mind, this sweetness of character, which marks also the later phases of our history, and which makes the story of Britain so much less ugly than that of other countries, a purely Anglo-Saxon trait brought over from Denmark and Schleswig ; or did the invaders, arriving eager for fierce conquest, fall quickly under the spell of our island and of the conditions they found therein ? Did their undoubted intermarriage with the British foster in their character those qualities which now differentiate them so markedly from their Teutonic kin across the sea ?

Is it the influence of Britain, rather than that of any one strain in our blood, that has made our race the most orderly, the most magnanimous, and perhaps the most kindly in the world ? Is there some quality in the land itself, some unchanging spirit of gentleness brooding over our countryside, which tames all men who come hither, whether they be Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, or Normans, and moulds them into one undying type ? What is the nature of this miracle wrought by Britain time after time upon the minds of those various peoples who have come home-hunting to her shores, so that to call a man British is to denote his character ?

Such queries must occur at the outset to the mind of those who study the early history of our race, and somewhere in that study the answer must surely lie hid. I will only say here that though the Anglo-Saxons arrived in our country as a highly civilized people, they seem very quickly to have raised themselves in their new home to a condition of far higher social refinement and

mental attainment than any which we can trace in their original habitations across the North Sea. Something happened to them when they had settled in Britain—something more than their formal conversion to Christianity of which I am about to speak ; and that is why we must give high honour to the term “British.” Whether it was the actual introduction of British blood into Anglo-Saxon veins, whether it was the influence of the British point of view, or whether it was the very spirit of Britain itself—the climate, the gentle countryside, the whole indefinable temper and character of the land and its people, which wrought the change, no man can now tell ; but certain it is that the Anglo-Saxons, the English as we now say, became a people different from their Germanic kin, gentler, more magnanimous, more kindly, more idealistic, yet of greater common-sense, more nearly approximating in certain ways to the Celt than to the Teuton, having the sterling qualities of the hardy north galvanized, as it were, and made articulate by that influence which, whatever may have been its means of approach, is to be termed in its essence *British*.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCOVERIES IN KENT

*(Richborough Castle and Canterbury).*

THE conquest of Kent by the Jutes, as I explained in a previous chapter, was accomplished during the period between their first invasion in the year 450 or thereabouts, and the death of Hengist some time before 490 ; and thenceforward for little over a century there is not much known of the history of the county beyond the names of its kings.

The Jutes were a civilized race, and their arts and crafts were of a high order. They were pagans, of course, like the Angles and Saxons ; and their language was that now known as Anglo-Saxon, the parent of the English tongue, though it had certain Jutish peculiarities. There is no evidence that they had entirely exterminated or expelled the original Cantii, the British tribe after whom Kent is named ; and it would rather seem that they had driven out the armed forces which had opposed them, but had allowed large numbers of the British population to remain in their midst as a subordinate class. The cities, such as Canterbury, and the fortresses such as Richborough, continued to be occupied ; and many of the Roman-British buildings remained standing.

Large numbers of Jutish graves have been

excavated throughout the county, but mainly in the eastern half, and in these a mass of objects has been found, including rich jewellery and beads ; weapons and shields ; utensils of bronze or pottery ; glass ; keys ; dice and draughtsmen ; toilet articles such as nail-cleaners, tweezers, combs, and mirrors ; coins ; and so forth.

At Faversham, eight miles west of Canterbury, the richest cemetery of this period in all England has been dug out ; and the splendid contents are to be seen in the British Museum and elsewhere. There is a fine collection in the museum at Maidstone ; and the museums at Canterbury and other places have much to arouse our admiration of the art and the wealth of these far-off men.



Silver Brooch from  
Faversham, Kent.

Then, in 597, there occurred the event which changed the whole course of the history of Kent, and, indeed of all Britain, namely, the arrival from Rome of the Christian missionaries under Augustine ; but I must here go back some years to relate the incidents which led to the sending of this mission to Britain.

Though the Roman military domination of the western world had collapsed in the Fifth Century, the moral influence of the fallen city remained so unassailable that Rome continued to be the centre of that Christian faith which had been the state religion of the empire at the time of the disaster ; and the church at Rome took on, in some sense, the work of the legions. Provinces of the empire, such as Britain, had been overrun by pagan

invaders and largely lost ; but in Rome there was always the hope of winning them back and incorporating them once more in some sort of world-state centred in the Eternal City, and it was obvious that the force by which this could be accomplished was now the church and not the army.

In the case of our own country, it was felt in Italy that if only the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain could be won over to the Christian faith, and hence to a renewed allegiance to Rome, the British Christians who remained unconquered in the western side of the island, and who had long since lost touch with Rome, though they still called themselves Roman citizens, would become united with the newcomers, and the whole country would pass back into Roman power.

Now there was at this time in Rome a certain monk named Gregory, and one day he happened to see in the market-place three yellow-haired boys who were to be sold as slaves, having been carried off, in some piratical raid, from the coast of Deira, the new Anglian or English Kingdom corresponding to the later Yorkshire.

Gregory asked the slave-merchant to what nation they belonged, and on being told that they were Angles, replied that they ought rather to be termed Angels, so charming was their appearance. " They come from Deira," said the merchant ; and to this Gregory answered with another pun. "*De ira !*" he exclaimed, which in Latin means " Away from wrath " ; " they should indeed be plucked away from the wrath of God, and called to the mercy of Christ."

He asked, further, what was the name of the



King of that country, and the man replied "Aella," (who reigned over Deira from 560 to 588). "Aella-lujah! Allelujah!" Gregory smiled. "The praise of God shall one day be sung in that land."

The impression left on his mind by these three Yorkshire lads was lasting, and when, some years later, in the reign of the Emperor Mauritius Tiberius, he had risen to be Pope of Rome, and was full of the scheme for extending the Roman power over the provinces of its lost empire, he set about the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, and chose Augustine to lead a band of 40 monks to Britain. Augustine was a very tall man of commanding appearance and stern manner; but he was appalled by the task before him, and tried his best to be relieved of the undertaking. Gregory, however, obliged him to make the attempt; and at last, after much delay, he and his party set sail from France, and landed at Ebbsfleet on the Kentish coast, on the east side of the waterway which then separated the Isle of Thanet from the mainland.

He had chosen this Jutish part of Britain for his adventure, rather than the Anglian coast further north, because Aethelbert, King of Kent, had married a Christian lady named Bertha (daughter of the King of Paris) who, he knew, had been allowed to practice her religion at the Kentish court, and had with her a French bishop named Luidhard who acted as her chaplain.

On hearing of the arrival of the mission, Aethelbert sent orders to Augustine to remain where he was, and, some days later, arranged a meeting with him, nervously insisting, however, that the interview should take place out of doors

where there was less chance of him being bewitched or made the victim of the stranger's magic, than there would be inside the four walls of a house.

Augustine and his party arrived at the meeting place in procession, chanting a litany, and carrying a silver cross and a painting of our Lord, all of which must have made the Kentish king feel very uncomfortable ; but at length Augustine delivered such a friendly speech that Aethelbert, though confessing that he did not know what it was all about, gave him permission to come to Canterbury and to make as many converts as he was able.

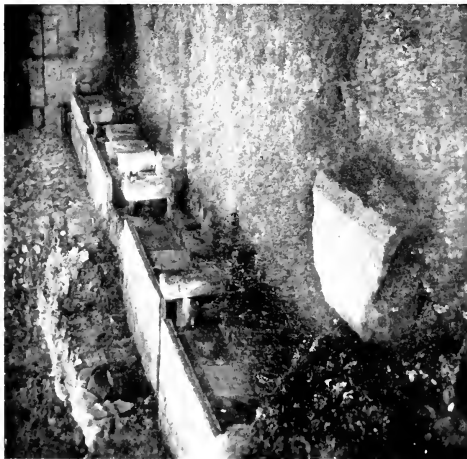
This meeting appears to have taken place at Richborough Castle, the old Roman fortress near Sandwich, and there the modern excavators have recently discovered a memorial chapel dedicated to St. Augustine. The party then moved on to Canterbury, where they found that the Christian Queen Bertha was in the habit of performing her devotions at the small church of St. Martin which had been built during the Roman occupation, say about the year 350 or so, and which had evidently



Jewelled Brooch  
from Howletts,  
Kent.

suffered no damage when the pagan Jutes took possession of the city.

This church still stands and is still in use, as I shall presently relate ; and its vast age of nearly sixteen centuries makes it the oldest church in



The Royal Tombs in St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury.

(p. 51)



The Font in St. Martin's Church, Canterbury.

(p. 52)



England, and one of the oldest buildings in actual use in the world.

Here Augustine and his companions held their services, and here on Whit-Sunday, June 2nd, 597, had the satisfaction of baptizing Aethelbert himself. After that all was easy, and on Christmas Day of the same year no less than 10,000 persons were baptized in the Swale, at the mouth of the Medway, not many miles from Chatham.

Not far from St. Martin's at Canterbury there was another church built in Roman times, and this had been converted into a pagan temple; but Aethelbert handed it over to Augustine, who dedicated it to St. Pancras, and there performed his devotions while he was building the Abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul near by. Meanwhile on the site of the present cathedral he re-consecrated a third church of Roman date, and named it Christ Church.

Having thus established himself at Canterbury, Augustine turned his attention to the British Christians who lived unconquered in the west of Britain; and he made the long cross-country journey to the river Severn in order to meet their bishops and to unite them once more to Rome. Here, however, he received a rebuff, for the old British clergy were offended by his arrogant manner—exemplified in his refusal to rise from his chair to salute them—and declined to join forces with him, preferring to maintain their independence as a separate Church of Britain; and the conference, which was held at Aust in Gloucestershire, was a failure.

The British Church, indeed, held views very

different from the orthodoxy of Rome. Particularly they observed the festival of Easter on a date arrived at by a calculation then obsolete in Rome, and the clergy tonsured their hair in a manner not in vogue in the Eternal City. Moreover, they were Pelagians, that is to say they held the doctrine preached by Pelagius, a Briton, who nearly 200 years earlier had made himself a figure of world-wide importance by denying the doctrine of Original Sin, for which he had been banished from the Roman world by a decree of Honorius and Theodosius. Pelagius, being a man of common-sense, declared that an infant was not born in sin, and hence was not condemned to damnation if it had the misfortune to die before being baptized. No sacramental rite of the church, he said, could of itself bring a human being into the fold of the elect of God : only his own innocence or his own good works could do that ; and therein he struck a blow at the dictatorial power of the church, and its hold upon the magic-loving minds of the people, which was furiously resented by the priests.

The text of much correspondence which passed between the Pope Gregory and Augustine is still extant, and in one of these letters we find the Pope gently urging his missionary not to be puffed up by his successes in Kent, which suggests that the British estimate of his character had some justification ; but in spite of many shortcomings Augustine remains in our mind as a great figure, and he had as much right as many others to be canonized as a saint when, on May 26, 605, he died.

The Abbey which he was building was not yet finished at his death, and he was buried in what was



St. Augustine's Throne, Canterbury Cathedral.



St. Pancras' Church, Canterbury.





to be the north porch of the church. He was succeeded as Archbishop of Canterbury in turn by Laurentius, Mellitus, and Justus, all three of whom had served under him, and these men were buried within this same building.

To-day if you happen to visit Canterbury and make your way to St. Augustine's College, the great missionary school of the Church of England, you may see in the grounds at the back the recently excavated ruins of this Abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul ; and there before your eyes lie the empty tombs of these first four Archbishops, whose bodies were afterwards removed elsewhere in Norman times. Here also you will see the tombs of King Eadbald of Kent, who died in 640, King Lothere, who died in 685, King Wihtraed, 725, and King Mul of Wessex, 687.

King Mul met his doom in Kent with 12 of his chief nobles, all being burnt to death in a house where they were defending themselves against a hostile faction ; and in this tomb the excavators, in 1924, found his charred bones and ashes.

The excavations have not yet been successful in uncovering the tombs of King Aethelbert and Queen Bertha, who are known to have been buried somewhere hereabouts ; but it is to be hoped that the work will be continued and that it will ultimately be crowned with success. Meanwhile, there is no other ancient site in Britain so well worth a visit as this wide area wherein the spade has already revealed so much that is of intense interest to those who have the story of our early history at heart.

A field now used as a football ground divides

the site of the Abbey from the ruins of the little church of St. Pancras where Augustine worshipped at the stone altar of which the base is still to be seen, and where King Aethelbert, before his conversion, made his oblations to the pagan gods. Here the excavations have revealed the whole ground-plan of the building, and the fact that it was originally a church of Roman date is clear.

But for those interested in this remote period the church of St. Martin, which is still in use, provides the chief show-place of Canterbury, and, indeed, of all England. Here stand the Roman walls just as they stood when Queen Bertha knelt in worship in this little building before the coming of Augustine, just as they stood, too, in the Fourth Century when officers and soldiers of the Legions, and toga-clad Roman-British citizens, came here to pray to the new Christian God of the Roman Empire.

Here you may see the font, of which part, at any rate, belongs to Augustine's age, and which may be that very font, as tradition says, whereat Aethelbert was baptized. The Roman doorways and the windows are still to be seen, built up with later masonry; and beneath the present roof the line of the flat ceiling of Augustine's time is clearly marked.

St. Martin's stands on a low mound on the eastern outskirts of the city; and from the doorway you may see the towers of the cathedral rising in the distance above the yews of the beautiful little churchyard. But in the Cathedral itself, whereon visitors generally concentrate their attention, hardly a trace of the work of the Anglo-Saxon

period remains ; and thus it comes about that they usually miss seeing the remains of the more remote age which they would find here in this little church and in the grounds of St. Augustine's College. Let me advise them, however, to go first to these latter for thus they will come to understand those roots of English life from which the great Cathedral buildings and all they stand for have grown.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTMAS AND EASTER

**I** SPOKE just now of the baptising of thousands of Jutes in Kent on Christmas Day, and as the festival of Christmas, as we know it, was introduced into Britain by these Jutes and Anglo-Saxons themselves, a few words in regard to it will not be out of place at this point.

Let me say at once, however, that Santa Claus, or Father Christmas, now so important a feature of the night of Christmas Eve, is neither Anglo-Saxon nor British. He is simply St. Nicolas, a much persecuted Continental bishop of Roman times, who became the patron saint of children, and whose festival on December 6, was marked by the giving of presents to good little boys and girls at school by a master dressed up for the occasion in red robes supposed to be suggestive of those of a dignitary of the Church. This custom was common in early England and on the Continent, and it was carried by Dutch settlers to New York, where the name Sankt Nikolas became corrupted into Santa 'Claus, and was given back to Europe in that form ; while the prize-giving ceremonies of his festival gradually were postponed till, and became identified with, the Christmas presentation of gifts.

In regard to Christmas itself, the date, December

25, was not recognized by the early Church as that of the birth of our Lord, for no record of the actual day had been kept ; and, curiously enough, there was no wish to celebrate the Nativity as a festival. Origen, for instance, writing in the year 245, says that it would be sinful to keep Christ's birthday, as though He was a mere King or Pharaoh.

In the Fourth Century, however, the ecclesiastical authorities were anxious to counteract the Manichæan propaganda, which declared that Jesus had been a purely spiritual entity and had had no physical birth ; and for this reason, amongst others, they began to favour the recognition of a definite date for Christmas, as a means of emphasizing the fact that Christ had been human as well as divine, but they did not advocate any festive rejoicings to mark the occasion.

Certain Christians favoured January 6 as the date of the Nativity, and others preferred March 25 or 28. Yet others suggested April 19, May 20, and November 17 ; and it is not until the year 354 that we hear of December 25 as being the adopted date, but even then there was no festival connected with the day.

The text of a letter from the Emperor Honorius (395-423) to his mother has been preserved, in which he speaks of Christmas as being a new solemnity recently introduced at Rome ; and in 400 an imperial rescript mentions Christmas, Easter and Epiphany, as three holy days on which the theatres were to be closed. But it was not till the year 534 that Christmas Day became a *dies non* in the law-courts.

Meanwhile the Syrian church continued to favour

January 6 as the date of the Nativity, and they angrily accused Rome of sun-worship and idolatry in having fixed upon December 25 as the sacred day.



A Stoup from Long Wittenham, Berks.

This is quite understandable, for the reason why the latter date had been chosen was simply because in many countries and in various pagan religions December 25 had from time immemorial been regarded as the date of the birth of the sun-god. It was, for instance, the date of the birth of Mithras, a solar deity whose worship was very wide-

spread during the Second and Third Centuries; and amongst the Germanic tribes it was the date of the birth or beginning of the solar year.

The venerable Bede, writing in the early part of the Eighth Century, tells us that "the ancient people of the Anglian nation," by which he means the English before their migration to Britain, "began the year on December 25, when we now celebrate the birthday of our Lord"; and we know from other sources that, like the worshippers of Mithras and others, this day was regarded by them as the turn of the year, the date when the sun, after its winter's death, was born again.

The Anglo-Saxons and kindred peoples in their pagan days gave the name Yule to the whole season of December and January, and this word seems originally to have meant "noise" or "re-joicing," December 25 being its culminating point.

According to Bede, again, the night of December 24-25, "which is," he says, "the very night now so holy to us, was called in their tongue *Modranecht*, that is to say 'Mothers' Night,' by reason of the ceremonies which in that night-long vigil they performed."

He does not tell us what those ceremonies were, but it is clear that they were connected with the birth of the sun-god, and the beginning of the new year. This night was the occasion of great rejoicing and feasting; and indeed the pagan Anglo-Saxons and their Teutonic kin seem to have made more of the festival than did any other people, though the British also regarded it as a great holiday.

Now, when St. Augustine and the other early missionaries from the Continent first began to convert these Anglo-Saxons in Britain to the true faith, the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord on December 25 had already become an established and solemn festival of the Roman Church; and therefore the pagan and the most joyous *Modranecht* brought to England by the invaders transformed itself into the Christian festival of the Nativity with very little difficulty.

The result was that Christmas amongst the Anglo-Saxons in Britain, and later amongst other Teutonic peoples, came to be celebrated with greater rejoicings than was the case amongst the Latin nations, for so December 25 had always been celebrated in pre-Christian days in the north, whereas the Church in Rome, as I have said above, had not at all whole-heartedly taken to the festival. In France, for example, no great importance was

attached to the feast, which is there called Noël, a corruption of (*Dies*) *Natalis*, " Birthday."

Indeed, until quite recent times the feasting and wholesale giving of presents at Christmas was unknown outside the Teutonic nations ; and even in Britain the rejoicings are to this day mainly an



Anglo-Saxon Doorway in the Church of Over Denton, Cumberland.

English custom. In Scotland New Year's Day is the occasion of greater festivities ; and in England itself there was in 1644 a recrudescence of the objection to the festive character of Christmas, and an Act of Parliament was passed in that year



forbidding any merriment on December 25, or any celebrations of the Nativity in the Churches—an Act which was repealed by Charles the Second, who restored the traditional English gaiety of the festival, idolatry or no idolatry, though in Scotland the Puritan view was adhered to.

The Yule-log, the candle-lit Christmas-tree, the holly, the present-giving, the plum-pudding and other ancient features of the happy day, so dear to our English hearts, are all of pagan, not Christian, origin. They came in with our Anglo-Saxon forefathers from Denmark and Schleswig ; and they were recognized by the ecclesiastical authorities, as I have said, only because the date, December 25, which was that of the pagan sun-festival and New Year's Day, had been adopted by the Church on the Continent as a suitable day whereon the unknown date of the birth of Christ should be celebrated.

It is a question whether the Christmas-tree had its origin amongst the Teutonic races, or whether it had been introduced into Germany by the Roman legions, for it seems to be closely connected with the tree displayed in the Roman Saturnalia, the great annual frolic, and Virgil speaks of such a tree with toys hung from the branches.

The text of a letter written in 601 by Pope Gregory to Mellitus, the missionary who was then going to Britain, is preserved by Bede ; and in it the Pontiff wisely tells him not to put a stop to the merrymaking and feasts of the Anglo-Saxons whom he may convert to Christianity, but to adapt the old pagan customs to the rites of the Church, and to maintain the festivities, only changing the

reason of them from a heathen to a Christian impulse.

This advice was followed ; and thus to-day we have our merry Christmas in England. And who shall say that we are idolaters because we have taken over a heathen holiday, with all its laughter and all its good cheer, and have turned it into a celebration of the greatest event in the world's history ?

True the festival on December 25 was unknown in the Church until the Fifth Century, and even then more as a solemnity than as a popular feast day ; true that day was previously a festival of the pagans ; but the good tidings, the tidings of great joy, needed a date for their celebration, and the old pagan holiday was there ready to hand.

The feast of the Resurrection of our Lord likewise found an ancient equivalent amongst the Anglo-Saxons with which it could be identified, for at the time of the Vernal Equinox they celebrated a great festival in honour of Eostre or Ostâra, goddess of Spring, the month of April, indeed, being dedicated to that goddess and being called *Eostur-monath*. A festival of the kind, whereat the resurrection of nature after the dead period of winter was celebrated, was almost universal ; and the ecclesiastical historian, Socrates, states without making any bones about it, that the Christian feast was a perpetuation of an older usage "in the same way that many other customs have been established." Bede, too, says that the feast in England was simply "the old festival observed with the gladness of a new solemnity."

Here again, as in the case of Christmas, it is pleasant to think that an ancient heathen jollification has been retained by the Church and has been given a Christian impulse, and that we in England still call it in the old English manner, *Easter*, that is to say the festival of the goddess of Spring, although that goddess is now no more than a name.

## CHAPTER VII

### ANGLO-SAXON PLACE-NAMES

WHEN the Anglo-Saxon invaders began widely to settle in Britain in the Fifth to Seventh Centuries they generally displayed that same tendency towards domestic exclusiveness, privacy, and independence which has remained a national characteristic ever since, and which is now exemplified in the saying that an Englishman's home is his castle. Each man of standing, at the head of his immediate family and dependents, but not in conjunction with others of his tribe, seized a piece of land, built his homestead, and fenced himself in ; and though he might be kindly and neighbourly, he showed little inclination towards a communal life, and had no wish to be herded with his fellows in crowded tribal settlements. Indeed it is noticeable that very few such homesteads were built near the great Roman roads.

In this he was similar to the Celt and unlike the German, for more than half the Celtic place-names in Britain and Ireland contain the words *llan*, *kil*, or *bally*, all of which mean a fenced enclosure of some sort ; and it has been suggested that the Anglo-Saxon may have been influenced to some extent by a habit of exclusiveness which was a British characteristic of long standing in our country. The majority of Anglo-Saxon place-names contain

some word meaning a fenced or fortified enclosure ; and yet so thorough was the conquest of the British that the erection of such defences can hardly be attributed to fear of attack. It was due rather to this exclusiveness, and to a strong sense of possession, a desire to call a piece of land his own and to regard it as his home, shared by nobody but his own family and his dependents.

The most common termination in Anglo-Saxon place-names is the old *tún*, the modern *ton*, as in Sutton, Bolton, and so forth ; and this word *tún* does not mean "town" but simply a hedged or fenced dwelling. The termination *-ham* is also of extremely frequent occurrence (Clapham, Balham, etc.), and this means "home" in its exclusive family sense. The common termination *sted* or *stead*, the old *stede*, also means an enclosed place, as in Stansted and Wanstead ; and this is sometimes combined with *ham*, as in Hampstead ("homestead") and Berkhamstead. The word *worth*, meaning a defined possession or estate, is found in many place-names such as Tamworth and Kenilworth ; and the termination *worthy*, the Anglo-Saxon *weorthig*, means a protected or "warded" place. So, too, *stoke*, *stock*, *stow*, *stowe*, and *stol*, as in Basingstoke, Tavistock, Chepstow, Edwinstowe, and Bristol, all mean a fenced or stockaded enclosure.

The word *croft*, meaning an enclosed field or small farm, is often used though perhaps not in the earliest times ; and the word *barton* or *burton*, derived from *bere*, "barley," and *tún*, "enclosure," and meaning the rickyard or granary of a private estate, is common ; while the word *staple* or *stable*,

as in Stapleford and Whitstable means the store-house of a property. So, also, names like Swinton represent the *tún*, or "enclosure," for the swine belonging to somebody's farm; and names such as Shepton mean the sheep-enclosure, as do those ending in *-fold*.

*Haigh*, *hey*, or *hay* means a hedged enclosure, and is found in names such as Rothwell Haigh, near Leeds, and Horsehay, near Coalbrookdale; and the word *park*, the old *pearroc*, an enclosed estate, is later combined with this *hay* in Hays Park, near Knaresborough, and occurs in other place-names. *Haw*, as in Hawes in Yorkshire, means



A Silver Brooch from Kirkoswald,  
Cumberland.

an enclosed house; and *hale*, *hall*, and *all*, as in Halesowen, Eccleshall, and Walsall, mean either a house or building or an enclosed meadow. The word *sal* or *sale*, as in Monsal or Sale means a nobleman's house. The termination *-side*, as in Amble-

side, sometimes written *-set*, means again a homestead, a place where somebody has settled.

These words indicate in each case the existence originally of but a single family's house or homestead, farm or estate; and the same implication is to be seen in the numbers of places called after a single individual, as Escombe (Eda's Combe), or Evesham (Eofa's Home), or after a single family,

as in the numberless names containing the word *-ing*. This termination *-ing* corresponds to the *-son* in family names such as Robertson, i.e., the descendants of Robert, or to the Fitz in FitzGerald, i.e., the descendants of Gerald. Thus the royal house of Oiscing in Kent was that of the descendants of Oisc; and hence place-names such as Warrington, Uppingham, and Wallingford represent the Warring family enclosure, the Upping family home, the Walling family ford over the river, and so forth: and the hundreds of such names show that individual families and not tribes are meant.

Then again a great many place-names are derived from words descriptive of the situation of the homestead, and this, too, rather indicates that the farm or estate stood by itself in country surroundings and was not a large settlement. Thus *shaw*, *holt* and *hot*, as in the case of Birkenshaw, Shaw, Holt, and Aldershot, represent Anglo-Saxon words meaning a wood or thicket; and *hurst*, as in Chislehurst, means a clearing in a wood or sylvan glade. The old word for forest has come down to us in forms such as *weald*, *wald*, and *wold*, as in the Cotswolds; and thus Waltham means "the home in the forest," and Walden "the valley in the forest." The Anglo-Saxon *treó*, a "tree," occurs in place-names such as Manningtree, and Oswestry (Oswald's Tree).

The frequent *ford* and the less common *lade*, as in Lechlade, indicate a homestead beside a river-crossing; but the use of the word "bridge," the old *bryeg*, is usually of later date. Other names are derived from words denoting natural features such as hills, valleys, and so forth, where settlements

of one or more houses may have sprung up. The word *low*, as in Hounslow and Ludlow, is the Anglo-Saxon *hláw*, meaning a rise or low hill. *Dean*, or *den*, means a valley, as in Rottingdean, (the valley of the Rotting family), Dean, Marsden, and Denton; and *combe* may be either Anglo-Saxon or Celtic, meaning a hollow in the hills—for instance Wycombe and Compton.

*Wich* or *wych*, as in Droitwich, means a salt-spring, or some sort of cleft in the hills; but there are also the *wich* or *wick* derived from *wíc*, the word for a settlement, as in Greenwich and Warwick, and the Danish *wick* derived from *wík*, a creek. Then we have *ly*, *ley*, *lea*, and *leigh*, the old *leáh*, meaning an area of pasture land, as in Hellingly, Chorley, Lea, Leaton, Leigh, and Hadleigh; and the many names incorporating *field* or *moor*, the Anglo-Saxon *mór*.

Some of the place-names ending in *well* are of the Anglo-Saxon period, derived from *wella*, a "well"; but the use of the word *burn* or *bourne*, meaning "a stream," is not usually as early. The word *holm* which occurs in many place-names, originally meant a mound, but was afterwards used for any raised ground.

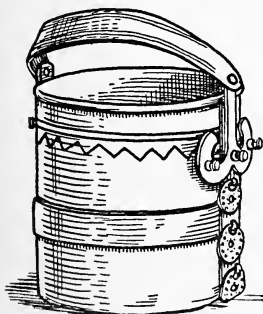
The old word *mere*, "marsh," as in Ellesmere (Ella's Merc) often occurs; and the many inhabited islands in the fens, rivers, or sea, retain the Anglo-Saxon word *ig*, meaning isle, in such forms as *ey*, *ea*, *ay*, or *e*, as in the cases of Selsey, Swansea, Rothesay, and Eton. The *eth* in Lambeth means a haven, and we have it also in its form *hithe* or *hythe*, as in Rotherhithe and Hythe.

Sometimes when an Anglo-Saxon house was



built in or near the ruins of some Roman or British stone structure, or beside a stone-paved Roman road, the word *stán* was used, meaning "stone"; and this comes down to us in such forms as *stan*, *stam*, *stain*, or *stone*, as in Stanton, Stamford, Staines or Stone. The word *wall* was also used to denote ruined buildings, an example of which is Wall, near Lichfield, where the ruins of Letocetum cover the ground.

Names of places on the Roman roads sometimes, too, include the word *straét*, "street" or "road," in its forms *strat*, *streat*, etc., as in the case of Stratford and Streatham. The word *port* was similarly used, as in Stockport and Portway. The Anglo-Saxon *geat*, meaning a "way," is also



Bucket, now in the Maidstone Museum.



Bronze Ewer, from Wheathampstead, Herts.

found in the form of *gate* in the case of settlements on a highway, as for example Reigate which really means the Ridge Way.

The walled cities or fortresses of Roman-British times were given the name *caster*, *cester*, *caister* or *chester*, as in Lancaster, Cirencester, Caister, Chester and Manchester; and in many such cases the old Roman-British name was retained, indicating that in such cities the original population still continued to live. Thus Glev(um) became Glou-cester, Venta became Win-chester, Man(ucium) became Man-chester, and so forth.

Many of the old strongholds, and many of the new, were called by the name *burh* or *burg*, which has come down to us in forms such as *borough*, *burgh* and *bury*, for example Boroughbridge, Edinburgh, Salisbury and Bury St. Edmunds.

Markets or market-towns were sometimes called by the old word *ceáp*, "barter," which now has various forms such as *chap*, *cheap*, and *chip*, as in Chepstow, Cheapside and Chipstead.

There are many places throughout the country which derive their names from pagan deities whose shrines must have been situated there, or whose property the land had become. Tewesley, in Surrey, means Tew's *ley* or pasture-land, Tew being the god of war whose name has come down into modern language in the form of the Deuce. There are also Great Tew and Dunstew in Oxfordshire.

The goddess Frig or Freya has left her name in Frathorpe in Yorkshire and Freasley in Warwickshire. The great god Woden is remembered in Wednesbury in Staffordshire, Woodnesborough in Kent and Wiltshire, and in other names derived from Woden's *beorh*, or hill. Thunor, the Thunder-god, has left his name at Thundersfield in Surrey

and Thundersleigh in Essex; and the name of Thor is to be seen in Thurleigh in Bedfordshire, Thursford in Norfolk, and Kirby Thore in Westmorland.

The god Saeter, too, comes down to us in Satterleigh in Devon and Satterthwaite in Lancashire. Easterleake in Nottinghamshire, preserves the name of Eostre, the goddess of spring, whose festival has given its name to our Easter; and there is a place called Good Easter in Essex. Hel, goddess of the underworld, is still remembered in Hellifield and other place-names in Yorkshire.

But when Christianity came and churches were erected, the villages growing up around the sacred buildings were called by names based on such words as *Kirk* (the old *circe*), or *minster* or *ecclesia* (as in *Eccles*); and the dwelling of the *preóst*, or priest, gave its name to places such as Preston.

In a later chapter dealing with the Danes I shall speak of the terminations of Danish place names in Britain, such as *-by*, *-thorpe*, *-thwaite*, *-toft* and *-beck*; and there are many others of Scandinavian origin, such as *-dale*, *-fleet*, *-gill*, *-ness*, and *-ster*, while many Viking heroes have left their names, such as Grim, Orm, Hakon, Asgar, and so forth, in places such as Grimsby, Ormsby, Haconby, Asgarby, and the like. But here I must confine myself to the Anglo-Saxon names; and in reviewing those I have mentioned above it will be seen that the great majority represent originally isolated farms and properties each held by a single individual or family.

Our Anglo-Saxon ancestors were essentially farmers, city life having little attraction for them ; and there on their farm-lands, or behind the fences of their homes, they developed that independence and that power to mind their own business, which is one of the strongest characteristics of our race.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EDWIN OF NORTHUMBRIA

*(Leeds, York, Goodmanham, and other places in Yorkshire ; Edinburgh ; Puffin Island, off Anglesey ; Lyminge in Kent, etc.)*

ONE of the outstanding personalities of the Anglo-Saxon period is that of Edwin, the English King of Northumbria, who reigned from 617 to 633. He was the son of Aella, the first English King of Deira, the southern province of Northumbria, corresponding roughly to Yorkshire ; and during his youth, being an exile from his country, he spent some years as a guest of the British King, Cadvan, in North Wales, a fact which shows, incidentally, that there was no such hatred between the two races as would have been felt if a savage policy of extermination had been pursued by the invaders against the Britons.

When at last he came to the throne in 617 he began at once to extend his power, and soon he had made Mercia, the Anglo-Saxon kingdom in the Midlands, and East Anglia, the English kingdom of Norfolk and Suffolk, tributary to him ; and he had annexed the little British kingdom of Elmet or Loidis (Leeds), which had survived till now as an independent British state.

Leeds, I may mention in passing, has nothing to show us now in relation to the Anglo-Saxon epoch, with the exception of part of a fine cross on the

south side of the chancel of Kirkgate church, and a handful of small objects in the Museum, including a nice little bronze workbox, once belonging to some English lady of about Edwin's period, which however, was found near Thirsk, some 30 miles to the North. But the fact that this neighbourhood was allowed to remain in British hands so late as 620 or so, although in the midst of the conquered area, makes it a place of exceptional interest as showing the tolerant attitude of the English to the Britons.

In 625 Edwin, who at this time was still a pagan, contracted a marriage with Aethelberga, daughter of the King of Kent, but it was stipulated that she, being a Christian, should be allowed to bring her priests with her into the pagan north; and in this company was the famous Bishop Paulinus, who is described by Bede as being "tall, a little stooping, his hair black, his face gaunt, his nose thin and aquiline, his aspect both venerable and majestic."



Bronze Work-Box from  
Kirby Underdale, Yorks.

In the following year, on Easter day, while the King was in residence at his palace on the river Derwent, a few miles east of York, he received a visit from a personage named Eumer who stated that he was an envoy of the hostile Saxon King of Wessex, and desired to deliver a message from his royal master; but as he approached the throne, he suddenly drew his long knife and sprang at the

Northumbrian monarch, who would have been killed on the spot had not his beloved friend and Prime Minister, Lilla, flung himself, although unarmed, in front of him, receiving the knife into his heart. So great was the force of the blow, however, that Lilla's body was transfixed, and the King behind him was also wounded.

The assassin was quickly despatched ; but the attempt on her husband's life so upset the Queen, who was expecting her first child, that that night she was confined, and gave birth to a daughter. Paulinus, very naturally, told the King that he owed his escape to Christian prayers ; and thereat Edwin not only allowed the baby to be baptised, but declared that he, too, would embrace the new faith if only Christ would first allow him to kill the King of Wessex who had thus attempted his murder.

As soon as he was healed of his wound he marched his army southwards and defeated and captured his enemy ; but, perhaps as a first act of Christian piety, he spared his life, and returned in triumph to the north.

Still, however, he hesitated to be baptised ; but now Paulinus resorted to an artifice which had the desired result. Edwin in his youth had once been made prisoner by his enemies, and at that time had dreamt that a stranger came to him and inquired whether he would be willing to do as he asked at some future date if now he freed him from his bondage. The young man replied that he would certainly do so, whereupon the stranger placed his hand on Edwin's head, telling him to remember this as a sign, and to obey the instructions of the

man who should come to him one day and should touch him in this manner. This dream had remained vividly in the King's memory, and it seems that he had related it to the Queen or to some friend, who had passed it on to Paulinus. The latter now made use of this knowledge : he entered the room where Edwin was sitting alone, and walking solemnly up to him, placed his hand on the royal head, saying as he did so " Edwin, do you remember that sign ? " Thereupon, the King fell trembling at his feet, and Paulinus told him that the time had come for him to honour his royal promise, and to do what was asked of him, namely, to be baptised.

This artifice settled the matter, but as a preliminary Edwin called his court together, and asked them what they thought of the new religion. To this question Coifi, the somewhat disgruntled High Priest of the old gods, who, judging by his name, may have been a Briton, made a curiously amusing answer. " Well," he said, " so far as I can see, the religion we now profess has no virtue in it at all ; for nobody has more diligently worshipped our gods than I, yet there are many who have had greater favours from you, and are more prosperous, than I. But surely if our gods had been good for anything, they would rather have seen first to *my* prosperity, since I have served them so carefully."

Another of the King's chief men, on being asked the same question, made the famous reply which is so often quoted. " The span of a man's life," he said, " in comparison with that eternity which is unknown to us, seems to me to be like the swift flight of a sparrow through the room where you



sit at supper on some winter's night with your officers and ministers, and a good fire in the midst, whilst storms of rain and snow prevail outside. The sparrow, flying in at one door and immediately out at another, is safe from the tempest for the moment whilst he is within, but then he vanishes from your sight into the dark winter from which he had emerged. So, too, the life of a man appears for a short space; but of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant. If, therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain, it deserves to be followed."

Others responded in like manner, and at last Coifi suddenly cried out: "For a long time I have known that there was nothing in what we worshipped, because the more I sought the truth in that worship the less I found it." Then, turning to the King, he said "I propose that we set fire to those temples and altars which we have consecrated without reaping any benefit from them."

"But," said the King, nervously, "who will dare first to profane them?"

"I will!" Coifi answered, and he asked Edwin



Anglo-Saxon Chancel Arch, Long  
Houghton, Northumberland.

to furnish him with weapons and a stallion. Now it was not lawful for a High Priest to carry arms, and he was only allowed to ride a mare ; but Coifi, greatly daring, buckled on a sword, and, holding a spear in his hand, mounted the stallion, and galloped off to the neighbouring village of Godmundingham, now Goodmanham, near Weighton, east of the river Derwent, where the nearest pagan temple was situated.

The people who saw him thundering past thought he had gone mad, but he did not draw rein until he had reached the sacred shrine, when, leaping from his horse, he flung his spear at the altar, and then set fire to the wooden structure.

After that the King and his court were baptised at York by Paulinus, who had erected there a small wooden church on the site of the present cathedral, this building being succeeded shortly afterwards by a stone structure ; and I may mention that this second church, enlarged in the following reign, was restored about 669, when glass was put in the windows, the roof was leaded, and the inner walls were whitewashed. It was burnt to the ground in 1069, and the present superb minster arose over the ruins ; but in the walls of the crypt you may still see a little of the earlier church, while there are traces of Anglo-Saxon work in some of the other churches in York, and fragments of crosses from graves of that age are to be seen in the city's Museum.

Meanwhile so great was the rush to join the new faith, that Paulinus was occupied all day long for thirty-six days on end in baptising the people who had gathered on the banks of the river Glen, at a

place called Adgefrin, now named Yeavinger, near Wooler ; and there were similar scenes at Catterick, the old Roman Cataractonium, on the river Swale.

The Pope was notified of the success of Paulinus, and at once sent a letter of congratulation to Edwin, together with a present of an embroidered tunic and a mantle of fine Ancona wool for himself and an ivory comb and a silver mirror for the Queen.

In the years which followed, Edwin extended his influence in all directions. In the extreme north of his Kingdom of Northumbria, which now extended as far as the Firth of Forth, he erected a fortress on the great rock which rises now in the midst of the city of Edinburgh, a name perhaps signifying Edwin's Burgh or Castle, though patriotic Scots derive it from a Gaelic word *Edin*, meaning "a cliff," and deny that the metropolis of Scotland was thus founded by an Englishman. There are no remains of this building now extant, and indeed there are practically no Anglo-Saxon relics of any kind found in the Lowlands, which shows that though the Kings of Northumbria, and later the Kings of England down to 1018, held this country, the Anglo-Saxons did not colonize it.

Edwin made a naval raid on the Isle of Man, and, having come to blows with Cadwallon, the British King of North Wales, trapped that monarch on Puffin Island, a small islet off the north coast of Anglesey, between Redwharf Bay and Beaumaris. Here there seems to have been a British monastic settlement, and the ruined tower which is now to be seen there may have some connection with it,

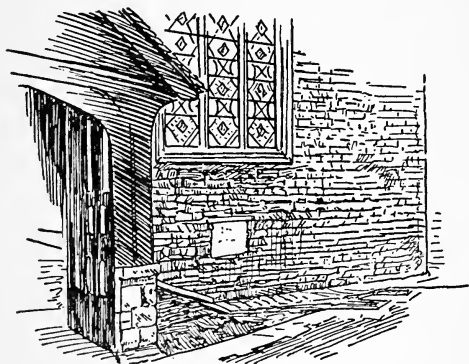
though otherwise the little island is but a storm-swept waste of grass and rock, where puffins, cormorants, curlews, and gulls share possession with multitudes of rabbits.

Cadwallon escaped in the end to Ireland, but a few years later returned, and joined forces with Penda, King of Anglo-Saxon Mercia, whose borders adjoined those of Wales and whose subjects must have included many men of British race. Penda, who was a pagan, had watched the Christian Edwin's growing power with an anxious eye, and he seems to have welcomed Cadwallon's offer of aid against him, although the British King was also a Christian. As a matter of fact Penda had often said that he did not object to Christians, but only to *bad* Christians, perhaps meaning that Edwin, in the warlike extension of his dominions, was no true follower of the faith.

Edwin's power at this time was at its height, and Bede states that "he reigned most gloriously over the nations of the English and the Britons." It was proverbially said that "a woman with her newborn baby might travel throughout the land without receiving any harm." He is stated to have put the country's roads in good order, and to have made drinking-fountains for travellers, each having a brass bowl hanging by a chain from a post. When he rode forth, a royal banner of purple and gold was carried before him, and the Roman *tufa*, a tuft of feathers attached to a spear, was held aloft in front of him in the imperial manner.

His end was tragic. Penda and Cadwallon, with their combined forces of Anglo-Saxons and Britons,

marched against him, and met him in battle on October 12, 633, at Hatfield, near Doncaster, now a small town wherein there are no traces of this period. Edwin, then 47 years of age, fell in the thick of the battle, and his severed head was carried to York, where it was afterwards deposited in the church; and that city became once more a British possession, being handed over to Cadwallon.



Burial-place of Queen Aethelberga, Lyminge, Kent.

Queen Aethelberga and her children fled with Paulinus back to Kent, carrying with them all that they could save of the royal treasure, which, so Bede tells us, included a large gold cross and a golden chalice, these being placed in the church of Canterbury. For years Penda and Cadwallon ravaged Northumbria, and it is said that it was the latter's intention utterly to exterminate the English. His

fate, however, I shall relate in the next chapter.

Queen Aethelberga spent the remaining years of her life in Kent, which was then ruled by her brother, King Eadbald ; and on her death in 647 she was buried near the doorway of the church at Lyminge which she had herself founded. Lyminge is some six miles inland from Folkestone ; and, set in the outer wall of the church, close to the porch, you may see a tablet on which is inscribed : “ The burial place of St. Aethelberga (Ethelburga) the Queen, foundress of this church and first Abbess of Lyminge, A.D. 633–647.”

In building this church Roman materials from a neighbouring ruined house of that period were used, and some of these, including Roman tiles, are still to be seen in the walls, especially on the south side and in the chancel. There are no less than thirteen charters of the Anglo-Saxon period relating to this church, still in existence, and in one dated 696 the building is called “ the basilica of St. Mary, the Mother of God,” but now it is named “ Saint Mary and St. Eadburga,” the latter being a shortened form of Aethelberga.

In 935 Archbishop Dunstan, of whom I shall speak later, restored it ; and in 1035 the bones of the Queen were removed to St. Gregory’s, Canterbury. The present nave of the church is thought to date from the period between 1020 and 1070, though, as I have said, some of the original walling still remains. The rest of the building is of Fifteenth Century workmanship.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TWILIGHT OF THE OLD GODS

(*Wayland Smith's Cave in Berkshire ; Chollerford in Northumberland ; Epworth and Bardney in Lincolnshire ; etc.*).

IN the last chapter I related the story of the conversion of King Edwin of Northumbria to Christianity, and of his death in battle in 633, when his army was defeated by the combined forces of Penda, the Anglo-Saxon King of Mercia, and Cadwallon, the British King of North Wales. Penda was a stout old pagan, of whom, in spite of his religious beliefs, the early writers have some good to tell ; but Cadwallon, though professing to be a Christian, is described as a most unpleasant personage.

As soon as the Anglo-Saxons began to settle down in Britain, the collapse of their old religion was inevitable ; for now that they had left the isolation of their original homes, and were closely in touch with the remains of the Christian Roman civilization, both here and across the Channel, they soon began to associate intellectuality with Christianity ; and they seem to have shown a keen desire to be regarded as one of the enlightened nations of the west, and not to be termed northern barbarians and heathens. In this new world into which they had entered it was evidently the correct thing to be Christian, and most of them adopted the faith in much the same spirit as that in which

eastern nations in recent years have adopted European clothes and manners, as a token of their modernization.

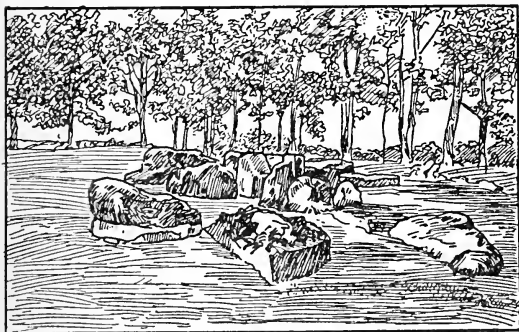
Moreover, Christianity presented to their superstitious minds a new and potent magic, much more virile than anything offered by their worn-out old gods. Edwin of Northumbria, it will be remembered, agreed to become a Christian if the new faith would give him power to kill his old enemy, the King of Wessex; and Coifi, his High Priest, abandoned the old gods because, as he declared, they had not contributed anything towards his personal advancement.

The pagan princes of the East Saxons demanded of the Christian missionary who was working amongst their people that he should let them eat "some of that white bread" which he was giving to the converts in celebration of the Last Supper, and which they regarded as a new magic. "We will not join your faith," they said, "because we do not know that we stand in need of it, but we will eat of that bread"; and when it was refused to them they drove him from their country. Raedwald, King of East Anglia, set up a Christian altar next to the pagan altars in the old national temple and worshipped at both.

Penda of Mercia followed a somewhat similar course, for while he had no objection to Christians or to his people adopting that faith, he himself preferred to remain true to the old gods. The names of some of these ancient English deities are preserved to us in our words denoting the days of the week. "Sunday" is the Anglo-Saxon *Sunnan-daeg*, the day dedicated to the Sun-god.



“Monday” is *Monandaeg*, the Moon-god’s day. “Tuesday” is *Tiwesdaeg*, the day dedicated to Tiw, the dark god of war. “Wednesday” is *Wodenesdaeg*, Woden being the great god of gods. “Thursday” is *Thunresdaeg*, or Thunder’s Day, thunder being a designation of Thor, god of storm and tempest. “Friday” is *Frigedaeg*, the day belonging to Frig, or Freya, the divine wife of Woden; and “Saturday” is *Saeterndaeg*, dedicated to Saeter, a form of Saturn.



Weland Smith's Cave, Berkshire Downs.

The name of Eostre, goddess of spring, as I have said before, is preserved in our word Easter. Nicor, a malignant water-god, is remembered in our term “Old Nick,” and in the fairylike Nixies ;

and Hjuki and Bil, the two children of the moon, personifications of the flow and ebb of the tide, have come down to us as Jack and Jill in the nursery rhyme. Weland or Weyland, the blacksmith of the gods, still figures in English folklore ; and close to the ancient Ridge Way which runs along the Berkshire Downs, south-west of the famous "White Horse," there is a prehistoric tomb, now marked only by a group of tumbled stones, which is locally called Wayland Smith's Cave, where, so tradition says, if your horse has lost a shoe you may have him shod by Weland's unseen hands, provided that you place a piece of money on a certain stone named "Wayland Smith's counter."

It is significant to notice by the way, that this group of stones originally formed the sepulchral chamber inside a burial-mound, the earth of which has now been removed ; and in Anglo-Saxon times it may well have had the appearance of a subterranean cave, and may have been supposed to be Weland's forge owing to the finding there of bronze weapons and other metal objects belonging to the original burial. The place is worth visiting, and I may therefore mention that it stands within a circle of beech trees fifty yards north of the Ridge Way, about one and a half miles south-west of the prehistoric fort which is on the hilltop above the White Horse.

There were, of course, many early Anglo-Saxons who adopted Christianity for no utilitarian purpose, but by conviction, and who were intelligent enough to embrace its principles, and to attempt to live up to its ideals. Amongst these I must speak of

Oswald, King of Northumbria, who came to the throne in 634, the year after his uncle, King Edwin, had been killed by Penda and Cadwallon.

Shortly after his accession he gave battle to Cadwallon and the British at a spot called Hefenfeld, or "Heaven's Field," generally identified with the site of the little chapel of St. Oswald which stands alone amongst the wide and rolling fields to the north of the Great Wall, about a mile and a half east of Chollerford, Northumberland. Here Oswald set up a cross, and holding it with both hands, commanded his men to kneel and pray before attacking the enemy. This they all did, and in the subsequent fight they defeated the British, and Cadwallon was slain.

In after years the monks of the neighbouring monastery of Hexham erected a chapel upon the spot, wherein the cross was preserved; and it became at length a regular place of pilgrimage. The existing chapel, however, is of later date.

King Oswald was a man whom Bede describes as "always modest, affable, and generous to the poor"; and so eager was he that his people should become Christians that he invited the Irish monks of the monastery of Iona, an island off the west coast of Scotland, not far from Oban, to send him a missionary to carry out the work. The saintly Bishop Aidan, who arrived in answer to the call, became Oswald's close friend; and there are some interesting stories of this personage which I shall mention in the next chapter.

In the end Oswald was killed in battle against Penda, on August 5, 642, his last words being "Lord have mercy on the souls of my men!"

His body was afterwards temporarily buried on the spot, the head and hand being severed from the trunk, and exhibited upon a post.

This battle is named *Maserfield* by Bede, *Cocboy* by Nennius, and *Burne* by Geoffrey of Monmouth ; but until quite recently the site remained unidentified, some thinking that it was Oswestry (Oswald's Tree) in Shropshire, some favouring Mirfield in Yorkshire, and some preferring Winwick, near Warrington, where the church is dedicated to St. Oswald, and where there is a well called after him, which has retained a tradition of sanctity into modern times—to such an extent, indeed, that a recent owner who filled it in was so troubled by the misfortunes which immediately befell him that he quickly opened it up again.

The researches of the Rev. A. Hunt, however, have now satisfactorily identified the battlefield as being at Epworth in the north-west corner of Lincolnshire, west of the Trent and south of the Humber, this being close to the ancient frontier between Penda's kingdom of Mercia and Oswald's realm of Northumbria. The name "Battle Green" is in common use to this day in Epworth ; Burnham the ancient *Burne*, is within a mile ; the name *Maserfield*, (the "field of the Masser, or Mass-priest") is retained in the modern Masser Close and Masserpool ; and *Cocboy* finds its explanation in the red marl rocks of the district, being derived from *coccus*, "red dye" ; while the spot where Oswald's body was fastened to the post is still called Studeross, *stud* meaning "a post," and the place where the trunk was buried is perhaps marked by a cairn called Craise Lound.

Later the head was taken to Holy Island and finally was placed in the coffin of St. Cuthbert, whose miracle-working bones were that monastery's chief attraction to pilgrims. This coffin was afterwards removed to Durham, as I shall relate in another chapter, being buried behind the high altar of the Cathedral; and there Oswald's skull still rests, after having being disinterred and examined in 1827 and again in 1899.

The right hand was sent to the chapel in the royal residence at Bamburgh Castle, as recorded in the next chapter; and as late as the Middle Ages it was still preserved there in a silver casket, but afterwards it was transferred to Peterborough. The arm and shoulder found their way, as holy relics, to Glastonbury Abbey; and one of the hands—I suppose the left one—is preserved to this day at Soleure in Switzerland.

Meanwhile the trunk of the body was disinterred and taken to Bardney Abbey in Lincolnshire, by a niece of Oswald who had married King Aethelred of Mercia, a successor of Penda. When the body arrived at the abbey night had fallen, and the monks refused to open the door; but next morning, when they realized that they had thus kept such holy relics waiting, they were filled with dismay, and declared that never again would they bolt or bar a door in the abbey, and so well was the promise kept that to this day in Lincolnshire the expression "You come from Bardney" means that the person so addressed has left the door open.

Early in the tenth century when Bardney Abbey fell into ruins, the bones of St. Oswald were carried to Gloucester; and when the abbey

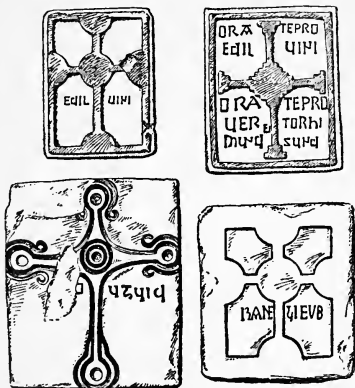
there was abandoned at the Reformation the remains were either scattered or removed and afterwards lost.

Oswald was not the only Christian King to meet his death at the hands of the old heathen, Penda. Sigebert, King of the East Saxons (Essex), had retired to a monastery, but when Penda attacked his people he agreed to lead them into battle, though, being now a monk, he refused to carry arms. The fight went against the Essex men, and the defenceless Sigebert, holding nothing but a wand, was cut down and killed.

Oswald was succeeded in Northumbria by his brother Oswy, whom Penda left in peace for thirteen years ; but in 655 there was a quarrel of some sort, and Penda, now 80 years of age, led a vast army against the northern kingdom, there being no less than 30 Anglo-Saxon and British sub-kings under the old heathen's command, each at the head of what is described as a Legion.

Oswy, thoroughly scared, fled to an unidentified castle on the Firth of Forth, possibly Edinburgh itself, and thence sent an embassy to Penda, offering him a huge sum as the price of peace. But the Mercian King refused to be bought off, whereupon Oswy, made courageous by despair, cried out : " Well, if the heathen will not accept our gifts, let us offer them to Him who will ! " and he superstitiously vowed that if he were granted victory he would hand over twelve farms to be turned into monasteries, and would see to it that his little daughter, Elfleda, should be sent to the nunnery at Hartlepool near Durham, and dedicated to perpetual incarceration therein.

He then marched southwards against the enemy, and the two armies met in the neighbourhood of Leeds. The battle was an overwhelming victory for Oswy, and the octogenarian King of Mercia, as befitted the last of the pagans, found a warrior's death in the thick of the fight. This was the twilight of the old gods, and soon their worship had wholly ceased.



Pillow-stones from Hartlepool, Durham.

I may mention in conclusion that the sad little Elfreda was duly made a nun and lived her silent life at Hartlepool, and afterwards at Whitby, on the Yorkshire coast, until she was 60 years of age, when, to use Bede's curious phrase, "she departed to the marriage-embraces of her heavenly Bridegroom." In 1833 the burial-ground of the

Hartlepool house was discovered, just to the south-east of the church of St. Hilda there ; and some of the pillow-stones from under the heads of the dead monks and nuns are to be seen in the British Museum and in the Black Gate Museum at Newcastle.



## CHAPTER X

### AIDAN, THE IRISH MISSIONARY

*(Holy Island and Bamburgh in Northumberland).*

OFF the storm-beaten Northumbrian coast, some eight miles south of Berwick-upon-Tweed, there is an island just over three miles long, separated from the mainland at high tide by a stretch of shallow sea, but at low tide joined to it by a fine sweep of hard sand across which a line of stakes, two and a quarter miles from shore to shore, marks a safe route for vehicles and pedestrians. It is now known as Holy Island, but in ancient days it was called Lindisfarne, and Bede tells us that in those days it was connected with the mainland at low tide just as it now is.

The mainland hereabouts presents a far-reaching vista of wild and rolling country, so swept by the east winds from the sea that the trees are all bent to the west; and down by the water's edge there are spray-soaked and marshy lands where coarse grass grows and sea-birds and wild duck abound.

Facing eastwards, you have this low island in front of you, running out at its north end into a spit of sandy hummocks called the Snook, and at the other end rising to Beblowe Rock, near which are the houses of the village and the bare ruins of the famous monastery of mediaeval times.

Away to your right, that is to say to the south,

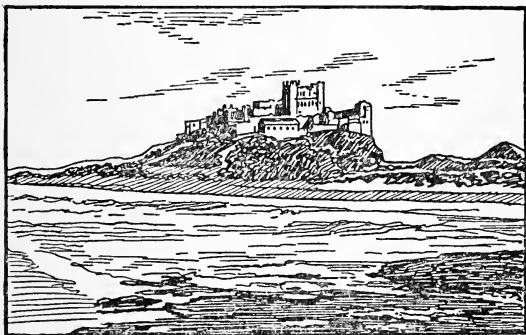
behind a ridge of high ground, lies Budle Bay, and beyond it Bamburgh Castle crowns a rocky mound at the edge of the waves ; while out at sea lies the cluster of little islets, known as the Farne Islands, on the easternmost of which stands the Longstone Lighthouse, the scene in 1838 of the exploits of Grace Darling, who lies in Bamburgh's bleak churchyard.

This weather-beaten stretch of coast, with its storm-swept islands, deserves to be better known than it is ; for here our forefathers from over the seas who founded the Kingdom of Northumbria, once the greatest of the English realms in Britain, first established themselves upon our soil.

Bamburgh was called Dinguardi by the British tribe of the Brigantes who inhabited this region in Roman times, and under that name it passed into the hands of the invaders, becoming, in 547, the chief stronghold and royal residence of Ida, the first English King of Bernicia, the northern half of Northumbria. Ida's grandson, King Aethelfrith, however, turned the fortress over to his wife, Queen Bebba, and it then came to be known as Bebbanburh, "Bebbas's Castle," which has now been contracted into the name Bamburgh ; but after that lady's death it became the sovereign's residence again, and so remained for at least another century.

The King of Northumbria from 634 to 642 was the famous Oswald, afterwards martyr and saint of whom I have spoken in the previous chapter ; and it will be recalled that at the beginning of his reign he invited the Irish monks who lived on the island of Iona, off the Ross of Mull on the west

coast of Scotland, to send a missionary to him to effect the conversion of those of his subjects who still worshipped the old gods. In 635 or 636 Aidan arrived in answer to this call, and was given the island of Lindisfarne, upon which to found a monastery. Aidan was presently made Bishop of Northumbria, and the sweetness of his character, his humility and his many Christian virtues, are recorded by Bede in glowing terms. Nothing now remains of the buildings which this gentle old Irishman erected on the island, for the ruins there, which in summer time attract many visitors across the sands at low tide, are solely those of the later monastery; yet the story of Aidan's life is not wholly forgotten.



Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland.

There are many tales told of him, but of these the most characteristic, perhaps, is that which

relates how King Oswy, who was his devoted friend, had made a present of a very fine horse to Aidan, who, however, had given it to the first needy traveller he had met on the road, for, says Bede, "he was a great friend to the poor and was the father of the wretched." Oswy, naturally enough, was annoyed, and, shortly afterwards, when Aidan had come to dine with him, asked him why he had thus given away so valuable a horse, to which Aidan ingenuously replied that the giving of happiness to one of God's children was surely more important than retaining the King's gift.

When dinner was served, Aidan quietly took his place at the table, but the King, much put out, stood for a while warming himself by the fire and thinking over what the bishop had said. Then suddenly he ungirt his sword—for he had just come in from hunting—and hastening over to the table, threw himself on his knees before Aidan and asked forgiveness for having shown annoyance.

Aidan was very much moved, and presently he sank into a deep melancholy, the tears coming into his eyes. His chaplain, speaking to him in his own language, which Oswy did not understand, asked him why he was so sad, to which he replied : "Because I know that the King will not live long ; for I never before saw so humble a King, and I conclude therefore that he will soon be taken away from this life, since the nation is not worthy of such a ruler."

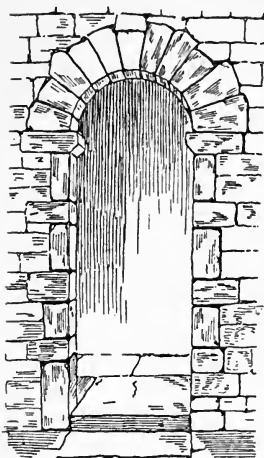
One of the tales tells how once at Easter he was sitting in the banquet-hall at Bamburgh as the

guest of King Oswald, and the feast was about to begin, when an official came in to report that there were many beggars outside who had not received the King's alms; whereupon Oswald, emulating the Irishman's reckless generosity, at once ordered the food on the table to be sent out to them, and further commanded that the silver dish before him should be cut into pieces and distributed amongst them. At this the tender-hearted Aidan, moved to tears, grasped the King's hand, and exclaimed: "May this hand never perish!"

A few years later, as I related in the previous chapter, Oswald was killed in battle, while fighting against the still heathen king Penda of Mercia, and the hand which had been so bountiful was struck from his body. It was taken afterwards from the field, and was placed in a silver casket which was still preserved in the church at Bamburgh in the Eighth Century, when Bede saw it. Simeon of Durham, too, writing about 1100, tells us that "on the top of Bamburgh hill is an exceedingly fine church in which is a costly and beautiful shrine, wherein, wrapped in a pall, lies the incorruptible hand of St. Oswald, the King."

After Oswald's death Aidan spent much of his time living as a hermit on the largest of the Farne Islands which rises from the sea in front of Bamburgh, at a distance of some two miles from the coast. He was here in 642 when Penda attacked the royal castle, and attempted to burn it down by setting fire to a huge pile of wood and straw heaped up on that side of the hill from which

the wind was blowing. From his island Aidan saw the flames rising, and passionately prayed that Penda's plans should come to naught, whereupon, it is said, the wind changed its direction, and the smoke and fire only served to throw the invaders' camp into confusion.



Chancel Arch in Escombe Church,  
Durham.

If you walk inland from Bamburgh Castle through the picturesque little village, you will come presently to the parish church which bears the name of St. Aidan. On the site of this building there once stood a wooden church where Aidan used sometimes to officiate; and he died, in August 651, in a little chamber built on to its west wall. At the moment of his death he was leaning against a beam which served to strengthen the wall; and a short time afterwards, when Penda

made another raid on the place and burnt down this church, it so happened that this beam was not consumed. Later, a new church which had been erected was also burnt down, but again the same beam survived; and therefore, when a third church was built, the beam was set up inside in

the place of honour, and Bede naïvely tells us that chips of it soaked in water and swallowed had often healed the sick.

Aidan was buried in his monastery on the island of Lindisfarne, and was succeeded by Finan, who, in his turn was followed by Colman; and it was this Colman who was the protagonist of the Celtic priests at the Synod of Whitby, of which I am going to speak in the next chapter. In another chapter, too, I must tell the story of St. Cuthbert, an Englishman, who in his day was Bishop of Lindisfarne, and in 687 died as a hermit on that same island where Aidan, his Irish predecessor, had also lived alone.

I may add that no fragment now remains at Bamburgh of any building of this age, with the exception of a sundial which you may see if you go down into the crypt of the parish church. The historic and romantic site of the royal residence on the hill, the earliest known home of an English king in England, is now occupied by the mediaeval castle which has been completely renovated, without much antiquarian taste or understanding, and is let out each summer in furnished suites.

Nor are there any early fragments left on Holy Island; but in the British Museum you may see a copy of the Gospels, written and illuminated by Eadfrith, who was made Bishop of Lindisfarne in 698. The work is distinctly Celtic in character, but shows strong English influence, and is far plainer than some of the grotesquely beautiful Irish manuscripts of the period. It is a lonely relic of those far-off days when Englishmen and

Irishmen, apparently unconscious of any racial animosities, endeavoured together, after their own lights, to raise the new realm of England to the level and to the ideal of the true Christian state.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE COUNCIL OF WHITBY

*(Whitby in Yorkshire).*

THERE are two great events which link the seaside town of Whitby, on the Yorkshire coast, with Anglo-Saxon days. The first of these requires some explanation.

In the chapter dealing with the life of St. Augustine, I pointed out that bitter differences of opinion existed in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries between the Church of Rome and that of Britain and Ireland, mainly in regard to the date of the celebration of Easter, a matter of calculation which we should now consider hardly of sufficient importance to inspire such ill feeling as it then aroused. The trouble was, however, that the British and Irish Christians had preserved their doctrines intact from those days when the Romans introduced the faith into our country, and now they had become traditional and national; whereas the teachings to which they objected had been imposed on the Anglo-Saxon converts by recent Continental missionaries, and represented a development which had taken place since the British Isles were last in touch with Rome.

Gildas and Bede tell us that one of the sins of the British, for which they had been punished by the Anglo-Saxon victories, was that they had

contemptuously refused to attempt to convert the English to Christianity; yet now these missionaries from Rome had effected that conversion, but, in the opinion of the British, had taught the converts a lot of new-fangled ideas about Easter and so forth which no patriotic Briton, firm in the ancient tradition, could tolerate either on religious or national grounds.

In speaking of St. Augustine, I related how he had failed to induce the Christians of unconquered Wales and the West of Britain to conform to the usages of Rome which he was teaching, or to take any part in missionary work amongst the invaders; but there were many Irish Christians (whom Bede, by the way, classes as Britons) who did not feel the same soreness in regard to these foreign settlers in Britain, and whose religious ardour impelled them towards missionary enterprises. A band of Irishmen, for example, led by Columba, landed on the coast of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland, in 563, and preached the faith to the Picts dwelling on the mainland, teaching them the customs of the original British Church, and in 635, when Oswald, the English King of Northumbria, was trying to convert his people, these monks of Iona sent one of their number, St. Aidan, to undertake the work, as I related in the previous chapter.

It is possible that Christianity had survived to a certain extent even in the parts of Britain already in the hands of the invaders, for it seems that considerable numbers of Britons were living, as a subordinate class, in the conquered areas, and at any rate it is noticeable that the efforts of

the missionaries bore fruit in a remarkably short time; but always there was this difficulty, that the teachings of the British and Irish did not conform to those of the Continental missionaries, and, in the matter of Easter, one set of proselytes would be gorging themselves at that feast at the time when another set was in the midst of its Lenten fasting.

St. Aidan, with his Irish monks, had established himself in 635 on Holy Island, or Lindisfarne, as it was called, off the Northumberland coast; and in the year 664 his mantle had fallen upon a certain Colman, who was also an Irishman, observing the old British calendar and usages,

and Oswy, King of Northumbria and all his people were of that persuasion. But Oswy's wife had been brought up in Kent, and therefore observed the customs of the Roman church as taught there by St. Augustine and his successors; and it seems that she at last persuaded her husband to look into the whole matter.

A great synod or council was convened, and was held in 664 at Whitby, then called Streaneshalch or Streonoshalh, which perhaps means "Lighthouse

**N**ic pūctio pūctūpūndū  
opinio quae debet  
anglorū. traditione  
maiorum ad nos usq; pūctū:  
qua uidelicet secura ad monachū  
cum pūctūm sūa pūctūm  
nos tūc sūa cupam pūctū;  
Dicunt quia die quadam cum  
adūctū. nūq; mīctūpūb.  
mutū uīctū in pūctū pūctū

Part of Bede's History from a MS. now  
in the British Museum.

Bay." Here there was a famous religious house at that time presided over by the Abbess Hilda, a lady of royal blood; and in its church King Edwin of Northumbria lay buried. Unfortunately, nothing of the building now remains, and although the ruins of the mediaeval Abbey which stand, gaunt and beautiful upon the cliffs, mark the site, and are in themselves worthy of a visit, there is nothing but the unchanged line of the cliffs and inland hills, and the eternal sound of the sea and the wind, to recall now the setting of this famous conference.

The protagonists on the British side were the Irishman Colman, who could hardly speak a word of English in spite of being bishop of an English realm, and Cedd, who was bishop of the East Saxons (Essex), but had been consecrated in Northumbria; and it may be added that the Abbess Hilda's sympathies were all on this side. Opposed to them, there were, amongst others, the Englishman Wilfred, Abbot of Ripon, who could not speak Colman's tongue, and Agilberct, bishop of the West Saxons, who was a Frank, and knew very little English. In this polyglot assembly, Cedd acted as interpreter.

Colman led off by explaining at some length that the Easter he observed was that ordained by St. John the Evangelist in the earliest days, and was hallowed by long usage; and Wilfred of Ripon then put the case for the other side, pointing out that the dating of the feast recognized by the Church of St. Peter at Rome had now been adopted throughout France, Italy, Greece, Egypt, and other lands in Europe, Asia and Africa. "Only

the Picts and the Britons," he scornfully declared, "in these two remote islands of the world, and only in parts even of them, foolishly oppose all the rest of the universe." (Observe that he speaks of the Irish Christians as Britons).

To this Colman replied, with some heat, that Wilfred had no right to use the word "foolish" in reference to a custom accepted by St. John; and Wilfred replied that he did not mean to charge St. John with folly, but only to say that a better calculation of the ecclesiastical calendar had now been recognized by the Roman Church, which was founded by St. Peter and was under the patronage of that apostle.

The argument had become somewhat violent when the King interposed with a question. He asked Colman whether he admitted that Christ had given St. Peter the Keys of Heaven, and Colman replied that that certainly was so.

"Well, then," said the King, "since he is the door-keeper of Heaven, I will not oppose him, lest when I come to the gates of the heavenly Kingdom there should be none to open them, he who has the keys being my enemy."

This silly point settled the matter, and Colman went off in disgust to Lindisfarne, and thence retired to Iona. Cedd, on the other hand, accepted the Roman practice, and, presumably, the Abbess Hilda did likewise; and that was the end of the British church in the Anglo-Saxon realms, though their authority was maintained in Scotland for centuries to come.

When King Oswy was gathered to his fathers he was buried here at Whitby, but his tomb is now

lost. In the year 680 the Abbess Hilda also died, and was buried here, after a life of such sweetness that all men, it is said, called her "Mother." But the second event of outstanding historic importance in the early history of Whitby, to which I have referred, was the discovery of the poetical genius of a certain lowly lay-brother named Caedmon, the first great poet to write in the English language, who was in charge of the horses belonging to the abbey. It is possible that he himself was of British, and not English, blood; for his name sounds Celtic, and the fact that his work was menial points rather to the same conclusion.



A Stone, now at Newcastle, inscribed in Latin and in Runes.

One night when he was asleep in the stable he dreamed that a man came to him, and, greeting him, said, "Caedmon, sing some song to me," to which he replied that he could not sing, and, indeed, was so shy in that regard that whenever the monks were entertaining one another with songs, he always slipped away from the company. "Nevertheless, you shall sing," said the stranger.

“What shall I sing?” asked Caedmon, and the other replied “Sing the beginning of created beings.”

Thereupon Caedmon poured forth a wonderful song, of which much remained in his memory when he awoke. He went therefore to the Abbess Hilda, and, forgetting his shyness, chanted the verses to her, and to all the learned men who were with her; and so impressed were they that they made him go back and compose more. This he did, and came again to them, singing the creation of the world, and all the early history of mankind, the life of our Lord, and the future of the soul in heaven or hell.

When he had finished his great song, the Abbess threw her arms about him, and he was persuaded to adopt the monastic life, thereafter living and in the end dying here on the cliffs of Whitby. The metrical paraphrase of the Bible which he composed was handed down in manuscript, and was first printed in 1655. It is the earliest poem in the English language composed in England; and when we remember that it was written at a time when the conquest of the country was hardly yet complete, we shall realize how far removed from savagery were our early Anglo-Saxon forefathers.

Visitors to Whitby to-day will see there a cross erected in modern times to the memory of Caedmon; and his memory deserves, indeed, to be kept green, for whether he was a Briton or an Englishman, we may place him at the head of the list of our national poets.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CONVERSION OF THE EAST SAXONS

*(Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex).*

OF the many buildings of the Anglo-Saxon epoch which still survive, one of the most ancient and most striking is the small and lonely chapel near Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex, known as St. Peter's-on-the-Walls, which was built somewhere about 650, not much over two centuries after the last of the Roman legions had been withdrawn from Britain.

The history of this stout little building, which has so successfully withstood the assault of nearly 1300 years, is of much interest. The story begins really in the year 604, when St. Augustine of Canterbury appointed Mellitus, a Roman nobleman, to the bishopric of London, at that time a very prosperous and more or less self-governing city owning a loose allegiance both to Aethelbert, King of Kent and to his nephew Saebert, King of Essex.

These two kings were Christians, and together had founded the church of St. Paul's in London, where Mellitus officiated and from which centre he carried on an energetic missionary campaign, in spite of the fact that he himself was a sick man, a martyr to gout; but on Saebert's death there was a reversion to paganism amongst the East



Saxons, and that monarch's two sons expelled the bishop and his priests—without, however, offering them any violence, one is glad to find—and proclaimed that the worship of the old gods was again permitted.

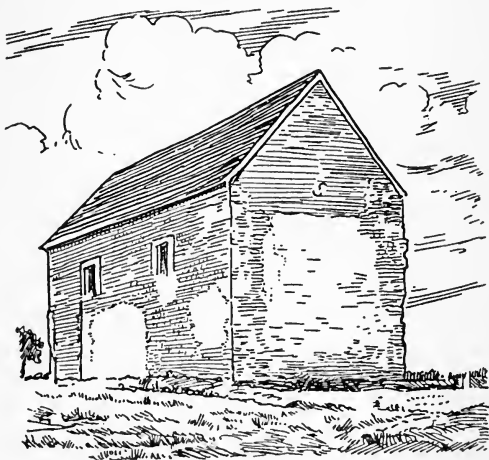
These princes, however, were killed in 617 in a war against the West Saxons ; and in 619 Mellitus, who had retired to France, returned and was made Archbishop of Canterbury, a position which he held until his death in 624. Essex, however, remained pagan for yet another 30 years or so.

In the year 650, Sigebert, called "The Good," ascended the throne of the East Saxons ; and, being a great friend of Oswy, the Christian King of Northumbria, of whom I have spoken in a previous chapter, used to go to stay with him from time to time. Sigebert was still a pagan, but Oswy persuaded him to be baptised into the Christian faith, and the ceremony was performed by the Irish Bishop Finan of Lindisfarne, the successor of St. Aidan, at an unidentified place which Bede calls "At-the-Wall," it being situated beside the great Roman Wall of Hadrian which passed across Cumberland and Northumberland from sea to sea.

Then, when the East Saxon King returned south to his own country he took with him an English priest named Cedd, brother of the famous St. Chad, to carry out the work of converting his people—a rough lot, according to Bede ; and soon afterwards this Cedd was formally made Bishop of the East Saxons. It will be remembered that he acted as interpreter at the Council of Whitby, recorded in the previous chapter.

The characters of King Sigebert and his new

Bishop are well illustrated in a curious incident described by Bede. A certain earl, one of the kinsmen of the king, had married a lady who, for some reason not stated, could not legally be his wife according to the new Christian code; and Cedd, having failed to stop the marriage, excommunicated the earl, and forbade any person to enter the house or to have a meal with the disobedient couple.



The Church of St. Peter's-on-the-Walls at Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex.

The King, however, did not take the prohibition very seriously, and, when the earl next asked him to dinner, accepted the invitation, and rode off to

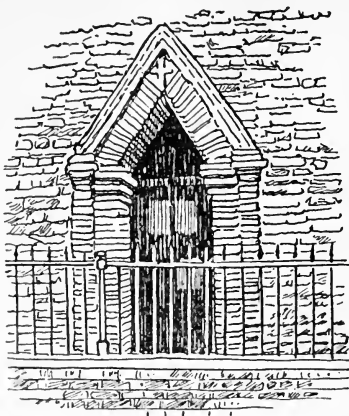
his kinsman's house without a thought. But on the way he met the bishop, who at once got off his horse, and stood sternly confronting his royal master. At this King Sigebert, caught like a naughty schoolboy, began to shake with fright, so Bede tells us, and, dismounting, crawled over to the angry Cedd, and fell on his knees before him, begging his pardon.

The bishop prodded him with his stick, and, in awful tones, said : " Forasmuch as you would not refrain from going to the house of that wicked and condemned person, you shall die in that house." What exactly he meant nobody knows ; but it was taken to be curse or a prophecy, and, sure enough, a few years later, in 660, the earl persuaded Sigebert to visit his house once more, and there murdered him. When asked afterwards why he had done so, he replied that it was because the king was such a pious fellow, always forgiving his enemies, and that sort of thing.

In this story Cedd appears as an awe-inspiring old autocrat, and his character must have been very different from that of his brother, St. Chad, who is described as the humblest of men. The good Chad was made Bishop of Lichfield, and outlived Cedd who died of some sort of pestilence which nearly exterminated the monks of a North-umbrian monastery he was visiting ; but when Chad himself was dying at Lichfield it is related that the spirit of the imperious Cedd was seen, as though he had come back to guide his modest brother on his journey into the unknown.

Cedd's work in Essex is said to have been centred at Tilaburg and Ythancaester, where he

erected churches and gathered his flock. Tilaburg is the modern Tilbury, where the docks are now situated; and all trace of Anglo-Saxon days has vanished.



Saxon Doorway, Trinity Church, Colchester, Essex.

Ythancaester, meaning "the fortress of Ythan," was the name of the town which grew up around the old Roman fortress originally called Othona, at the mouth of the Pent or Blackwater River, two miles east of the village of Bradwell, that is to say eight miles by road north-east of Southminster, and sixteen as the crow flies from Southend-on-Sea. The fortress was probably already in ruins in Cedd's day, and in building his church here, right across the old Roman rampart,

he used stones and tiles taken from its abandoned barracks and offices.

The church which he erected and which still exists, is an unpretentious little structure, 55 feet long and 26 feet wide, as it now stands, the walls being two feet thick ; but the original apse at the east end is destroyed, and in the present east wall you can see parts of the three brick arches which led into it, now built up with the later masonry. A porch, too, at the west end has disappeared. In mediaeval times the building was deserted, and in the days of the Stuarts was used as a sort of lighthouse. Later it was turned into a barn, and, during the great War it served as a military post ; but in 1920 it was re-opened as a church, after being patched up and slightly restored, and it is now under the control of the Cathedral Chapter of Chelmsford.

It stands, bleak and grey, amidst the fields near the sea, where, at low tide, the wide mud-flats lie exposed beyond the weather-beaten sea-wall of earth and sods. Three miles to the north, away across the estuary of the Blackwater, lies Mersea Island, beyond which Brightlingsea can just be seen, and the coast line passing round to Clacton-on-Sea ; while southwards you may look along the flats to Foulness Point.

On a sunny day this wide area of low-lying fields, where often you may see flights of wild duck passing over the solitary little church, has a beauty of its own ; but in wintry weather, as when last I came over from Southminster to visit it, there is an extraordinary desolation in the scene. A wet wind was then blowing across the flats, and

the road being puddled by recent rain and rutted by the passage of some heavy vehicle, looked like a highway of Cedd's day.

Inside the church the bare walls and the sanded floor were cheerless, too ; and the modern chairs and the little altar with which it is now furnished did not seem to help to bring back the living spirit to the place. It is a cold and lonely relic of an age of burning enthusiasm, only used now for an occasional service ; and the wind which moaned around its brave old walls when I was there was like the voices of the dead.

The reason why it is called " St. Peter's " is, I fancy, connected with the council of Whitby of which I spoke in the last chapter. It will be remembered that that conference, at which Cedd acted as interpreter, was held in 664 to decide whether the church in Britain should conform to the new ecclesiastical calendar of the church of St. Peter in Rome or to the earlier calendar of the British church which had been cut off from Rome since the Anglo-Saxon conquest.

Cedd had been trained in the British school, but when the advocates of the Roman system won the day at Whitby, he changed his allegiance, and for that reason, I think, dedicated this church of his to St. Peter, who, as King Oswy had pointed out at the conference, held the keys of heaven, and was therefore to be propitiated, lest he should refuse to open the celestial gates.

These early Christians were simple souls, who gave as much attention to those material arguments which we to-day deem to be of no spiritual significance, as they did to the self-sacrifices of the



St. Peter-on-the-Walls, Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex.



West-end of St. Peter-on-the-Walls.

(p. 106)





spiritual life which we now consider to be of too much material disadvantage to be practised. The faith has changed both for the better and for the worse ; but a building such as St. Peter's-on-the-Walls still links us to the far-off days, and one is glad to find that quite a number of visitors come to see it in the summer, and that it is from time to time the goal of an organized pilgrimage.

## CHAPTER XIII

### WILFRED AND HIS BUILDINGS

*(Selsey in Sussex; Hexham in Northumberland, etc.).*

**I**N a previous chapter I spoke of the somewhat heated conference held at Whitby in 664, and it may be remembered that the most successful controversialist there present was Wilfred, Abbot of Ripon, an earnest and hard-working but ambitious and rather tactless personage, who had once been a monk at Lindisfarne (Holy Island), and had afterwards been trained at Lyons and Rome.

A few years after the Whitby affair this Wilfred was appointed Bishop of York, but in 678 he quarrelled with his sovereign, Ecgfrith of Northumbria, and was deposed. The cause of the trouble was the virginal Queen Aethelthryth (Etheldrida), afterwards known as St. Audrey, wife of Ecgfrith, and daughter of Anna, King of East Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk), who, for twelve years of married life kept her husband at arms' length, and finally announced her intention of becoming a nun.

In this she had the support of Wilfred, and at last she took the veil at his hands, and ultimately became Abbess of Ely, in which office, so Bede tells us, "she never wore any linen, but only woollen garments, and would rarely wash in a hot

bath, except just before Easter, Whitsuntide, and Epiphany." Ultimately she died of a swelling in her throat which a certain doctor named Cynefrith had unsuccessfully operated upon.

Some years after her death the recollection of her austerities caused her to be regarded as a saint ; and the nuns decided, therefore, to dig up her bones, and to employ them as holy relics, it being the custom of that age to use the bones of the saintly dead as a means of effecting what would now be called "faith-cures." But when they opened her coffin they found to their amazement that the body—as sometimes happens—had not decomposed, and that the incision in her neck, which had been a gaping wound when she died, had shrunk—very naturally—to an almost indistinguishable little cut ; and this, they said, proved what a chaste life she had lived, and thereafter her re-coffined remains became one of the chief attractions of Ely.

Meanwhile Wilfred had made the long journey to Rome to complain to the Pope about his expulsion, and the latter had sent him back with a letter to the King saying that he must be reinstated ; but Ecgfrith, displaying



Ancient Seal of Chichester Cathedral, brought from Selsey, Sussex, and probably representing Selsey Cathedral.

a very English independence, had refused to accept the Papal decision, and Wilfred, to his

astonishment, had found himself in prison at Dunbar, then part of the English kingdom of Northumbria.

Nine months later, however, he had been released, and had wandered southwards to Sussex, where he had established himself on Seal's Isle, now called Selsey, and had done five years' of fine missionary work amongst the still heathen South Saxons.

After the deaths of Ecgfrith and his virgin queen, Wilfred was invited back to York ; but once more he got into trouble and was transferred to the less important see of Leicester. Again he went to Rome, but on his return in 705, he was obliged to content himself with the new see of Hexham in Northumberland ; and there he remained till he died, in 709, while on a visit to the monastery of Undalum, now called Oundle.

His body was taken back to Ripon and was laid in the Abbey which he himself had built there in 669 ; but later it is said to have been transferred to Canterbury, though both places afterwards claimed his bones, and a shrine was erected at Ripon about 980, which was believed to contain them.

Nothing now remains of any buildings which Wilfred may have constructed at York : and at Selsey his church is now at the bottom of the sea, for the low and sandy coast of Selsey Bill has been, and is still being, steadily eaten away by the waves, and the site of the building is now a mile and more away from the shore, though to this day the fishermen there will tell you that of a Sunday morning you may sometimes hear its submerged and

muffled bells pealing out when the wind blows in from the south.

At Ripon there are a few traces of his work, and a small crypt under the existing cathedral still stands almost in the condition in which he left it more than 1200 years ago, so far as the structure is concerned. At Hexham, however, a somewhat similar but more imposing crypt built by him is to be seen ; and in this chapter it will be more useful to describe the latter.

Hexham is a small Northumbrian town on the banks of the Tyne, some twenty miles west of Newcastle, and about three and a half miles from the ruins of the old Roman-British city of Corstopitum, adjoining the modern Corbridge.\* Corbridge, I may mention in passing, still contains a church, of which the porch and part of the nave date from about Wilfred's age ; but its interest is overshadowed by that of its more historic neighbour.



Bronze Bucket from  
Hexham, Northum-  
berland.

The history of Hexham begins very shortly after that of Corstopitum ends ; for the latter city was deserted by the British when they were falling back before the advance of the English invaders in the Fifth and early Sixth Centuries, and Hexham, at that time called Hestoldesham or Hextildesham, took its place as the local metropolis, and was already a town of importance in 674 when the chaste Queen Aethelthryth gave it to

\* *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 121.

Wilfred so that he might build his abbey there.

The church which he erected was of such size and magnificence that, according to Eddius, his choir-master, there was no building anything like so splendid on this side of the Alps. It was 150 feet in length; and though it was incorporated as part of the nave of the Twelfth Century Priory erected upon the same site, and suffered destruction during a wild invasion of the Scots in 1296, modern excavations have exposed its east end under the present choir, and its west end is still to be discerned in a few of the lower courses of the masonry in the existing west front.

The crypt, however, remains structurally exactly as it was in Wilfred's day, which was but 250 years after the withdrawal of the Roman legions from Britain; and if you have pictured your Anglo-Saxon ancestors as barbarians in those early years of their residence in our island, I recommend you to make the journey to Hexham, to estimate the great size of Wilfred's church by pacing 150 feet along the present nave, and then to visit this perfect little underground crypt, where once the bones of dug-up saints were kept as miracle-working relics, and where the pilgrims of the Seventh Century used to pay their homage.

You go down, just as they did, by a flight of narrow steps in the middle of what is now the west end of the nave, and at the bottom you find yourself in an ante-chamber to-day illuminated by electric light but in those remote times dimly lit by lamps burning in recesses in the walls, still to be seen. In front of you is an arched doorway leading into the *confessio*, or sanctuary where the

relics were kept, this being a small chamber with an arched roof.

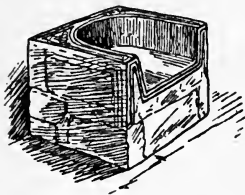
The pilgrims, it would seem, were not allowed to enter the sanctuary, but having made their prayers at its entrance, they passed out by a passage on the left, leading back to the upper church by a flight of steps now blocked up. There is another passage to the right, used by the priests to enter the sanctuary, but here again the steps are blocked up, and you can follow it for only a few mysterious yards.

The whole crypt was constructed of dressed stones filched from ruined Corstopitum, and one of the blocks which roofs the passage whereby the pilgrims made their return journey was originally a Roman dedicatory tablet, and you may look up at the old inscription upon it which once contained the name of the Emperor Geta, son of the Emperor Severus who died at York in 211 A.D. This Geta's name was afterwards everywhere erased by his brother and murderer Caracalla, and here you may see the letters carefully hammered out, though the imperial titles still remain.

These blocks were all hidden by a layer of cement smoothed over them by Wilfred's builders, but this has now fallen off, except on parts of the ceiling, where it remains just as it was. The whole place, in fact, is substantially as it was 1250 years ago ; and the impression it makes upon the modern visitor is profound : there is nothing to be compared with it in all England, for the crypt at Ripon is much inferior.

Upstairs in the western nave the font used in Wilfred's time, with its original lining of lead, is

still employed at modern baptisms, and around the walls of the building there are several fragments of the first church, richly carved. In the middle of the choir, too, stands the self-same episcopal throne whereon Wilfred used to sit. It is made of a block of stone, out of which the seat is scooped ; and on the arms the original scroll-decoration still remains perfect.



Wilfred's Stool in Hexham Abbey,  
Northumberland.

Looking at it one recalls the vicissitudes of the life of this early English bishop, and his long journeys to Rome to obtain redress for his wrongs. When he used to sit here, however, he was an old man, and the evening of his troubled days had come upon him ; and though his mind sometimes must still have turned sadly to the memory of his lost see of York, we may suppose that he looked back with some satisfaction to the years of his great work at Selsey where he had baptised so many of the men of Sussex in that cathedral of his which now lies till the end of time at the bottom of the sea.



## CHAPTER XIV

### CUTHBERT AND HIS BONES

*(Holy Island and Farne Island, Northumberland; Durham, etc.)*

THE wanderer in search of Anglo-Saxon remains will find himself, sooner or later, drawn to the county of Durham by the attraction of that pleasant old historian Bede, who wrote his famous books at Jarrow, on the Durham side of the Tyne, and died there in the year 735, as I shall relate in the next chapter. One of these books deals with the life of Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne, who, after his death in 687, became a sort of patron saint of Durham Cathedral, where you may still see his tomb; and the story of this extraordinary man, and of the subsequent adventures of his bones, is one which deserves to be remembered.

Cuthbert was born in the wild country north of the Tweed, some seventy years or so after the death of Ida, the first King of that region, and while still a child showed a marked tendency to wander about alone or to sit by himself in silence, thus indicating that he was destined for the monastic life which, strange to say, made such a wide appeal to the early English.

One day when he was sitting at the roadside nursing his knee which had become swollen owing to a sprain, a traveller who chanced to ride by

advised him to put a bread poultice on it ; and the boy having done so, and having thus obtained relief, came to believe that the traveller had been an archangel, and that he himself was under the special care of heaven.

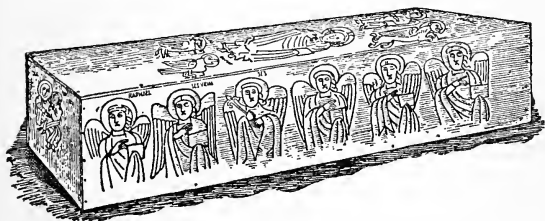
Later on he wandered southwards, and once while he was tending a flock of sheep on the north bank of the Tyne, near its mouth, where now stands North Shields, he happened to see five vessels, aboard which were several monks, fighting against a westerly gale to reach the opposite shore (at South Shields) where their monastery was situated ; whereupon he at once went down on his knees, in spite of the jeers of a crowd of pagan villagers, and prayed that the wind might drop. This it did, the monks coming safely to shore ; and again Cuthbert perceived that he had been concerned in a miraculous occurrence.

Shortly after this, he set out northwards to ride to Melrose, in the Lowlands, where there was a monastic settlement ; but while resting, very hungry, in a deserted hut, he discovered a parcel containing meat and bread, apparently hidden by some other user of the shelter, and believing that this was a gift personally made to him by an angel, he thankfully ate the meat and gave half the bread to his horse.

Having arrived at Melrose, he was at once enrolled as a monk, and was allotted the task of receiving strangers. Here, one morning, there came a traveller who asked for breakfast, but hurried on his way again before Cuthbert had finished feeding him, leaving behind him, however, by way of a gratuity, three of his own loaves of white bread.

When the young monk found these loaves on the table, and the stranger gone, he sampled one of them, and, declaring that it surpassed the lily in whiteness, the rose in smell, and honey in taste, perceived that yet another angel had paid him a visit, and that the loaves were the food of Paradise.

Once while staying near the sea at Coldingham, he was seen by his fellow monks to go down at night to the beach, and to spend many hours in the water, which, in itself, was astonishing enough ; but their amazement may be imagined when in the grey dawn they saw two otters approach him from a neighbouring stream and rub themselves against his feet, while Cuthbert, who could always do anything he liked with animals, talked to them and gave them his blessing. The monks, it is said, nearly died of fright.



St. Cuthbert's Coffin, Durham.

At length, after spending many years at Melrose, he went to the monastery of Lindisfarne, or Holy Island, off the Northumbrian coast, of which I have spoken in a previous chapter ; but, later, desiring

to live the life of a hermit, he established himself in absolute solitude on Farne Island, some miles to the south but in sight of Lindisfarne. Here he built himself a hut of stones and turf, and therein lived so godly a life that for months at a time he did not wash, nor even remove his leathern gaiters.

This island, which lies nearly two miles out to sea from Bamburgh Castle, is one of nearly thirty little isles grouped close together, and contains a few acres of ground partly covered with grass, and surrounded by basaltic rocks, which rise on the west side to a height of some eighty feet, but on the east side slope down to the water. It was on this latter side that the hermit made his habitation, and here he lived from 676 to 685.

He sowed a little patch of barley on this island, from which the sparrows kept their distance at his special request ; and he built a shelter on the beach wherein the monks who visited him might take cover from rain and storm. Once he caught some crows picking straw from the roof of this shelter ; but having admonished them, he very kindly allowed them to build their nests nearby, and not only were they seen to ask his pardon in a most pitiable manner, but never again did they steal his straw. Indeed, two of them brought him a lump of hog's lard as a peace-offering, and with this Cuthbert was wont for a long time to clean his visitors' shoes. Even the sea obeyed him, for one day, when he was in need of a beam of wood for a hut he was constructing, the waves brought him one of just the necessary size, and deposited it at low tide close to the spot where it was required.

At last King Ecgfrith of Northumbria, impressed by Cuthbert's unconscious miracles, came personally to the island, and, after many entreaties, persuaded him to accept the bishopric of Lindisfarne, although the austerities which he had practised had now made a hopeless consumptive of him at the age of not much more than fifty years. Shortly afterwards, however, in May, 685, this monarch made an expedition into Scotland, and was ambushed and killed at Dunnichen near Forfar; and Cuthbert's miraculous powers were once more displayed by the fact that just at the hour of the disaster, while the good bishop was in Carlisle and was admiring an old fountain erected by the Romans, he suddenly muttered some words which afterwards were interpreted as having foretold the King's death.

Thereafter, in January, 687, Cuthbert returned to cough his life away in the bitter cold of his little, storm-swept island; and there one spring morning, after a gale had cut off the island for five days, he was found dying on the beach, having been too weak to move or to take any sustenance for several days, with the exception of an occasional nibble at an onion. The news of his death, which occurred on March 20, 687, was signalled to Lindisfarne by the waving of two torches; and presently the monks came chanting and lamenting to fetch his body, which they buried with much pomp in a stone coffin under the pavement of their church at Lindisfarne.

Here the body rested until 698, when it was dug up, and, being found to be well preserved, was clothed in rich robes and placed in a wooden coffin

decorated with religious figures. Some two centuries later the Danish menace caused the monks of Lindisfarne to leave their island, and, before going, they opened the saint's coffin, placed inside it the decapitated head of St. Oswald, the King of Northumbria slain in 642, which was another of their holy relics, and also a few other revered bones, and thus carried their whole sacred collection away with them.

Having travelled across England to Workington on the Cumberland coast, they placed the coffin on a vessel with the idea of conveying it to Ireland, but a storm drove them to the Scotch side of Solway Firth, where the coffin was safely landed. A fine copy of the gospels, however, had fallen into the sea during the gale, but this was fortunately washed up later on the sands at Whithern in Gallo-way, and is now safe in the British Museum.

Wandering on, the monks came at length to Chester-le-Street, six miles north of Durham, and here new robes of silk were placed about the bones, while a rich stole bearing the name of Queen Aelfled, second wife of Edward the Elder, and that of Bishop Frithstan of Winchester, was added to the collection about 915. The coffin remained here till 995, after which it was taken for a while to Ripon ; but in the same year, while in the sparsely inhabited neighbourhood of the later Durham, it suddenly became so heavy that the monks, weary of their search for a suitable place to settle, were led to believe that here was the spot the saint had chosen for his final resting-place.

A wooden church was therefore built to receive it on the headland of rock in the loop of the River

Wear, where now stands Durham Cathedral, and in 998 a larger building of stone was erected. This was swept clean away when the present edifice was constructed in 1092, and nothing now remains of it ; but Cuthbert's coffin, in which the bones had been robed in new silks in 1104, was placed in a tomb behind the high altar of the cathedral, and though the shrine erected over it was destroyed at the Reformation you may still see in the surrounding flagstones the marks made by the knees of countless pilgrims who knelt there in prayer.

In 1827 the coffin was opened, and the bones of the saint were found to be closely wrapped in these robes of silk, while the Winchester stole lay amidst them, wonderfully preserved. Cuthbert's own cross, made of gold and set with stones, and a little portable altar of wood and silver were found in the coffin, and also the ivory comb he had used. The skull of St. Oswald was there, too, and the great gash in it which had killed him was clearly to be seen.

The bones and the skull were buried again in the saint's tomb, but in 1899 they were once more inspected, and it was then observed that Cuthbert's breast-bone showed clear signs of tuberculosis. It was seen, too, that there was a mark upon one of the bones, which was able to be identified as that caused by a bad abscess ; and it was recalled that Cuthbert, according to Bede, had suffered from just such an abscess which was said to have bitten to the very bone.

To-day you may examine and marvel at the vestments and objects taken from the coffin, and also the fragments of the coffin itself, in the library

of Durham Cathedral;\* but if you would fully appreciate them and the drama of Cuthbert's life you must go to Bamburgh Castle, as I did on a wild winter's day, and look across the tossing waves to the little island drenched with spray where he spent so many years and where in the end he died.

\* *A History of Durham Cathedral Library*, by the Rev. D. H. Hughes, gives full details of the many relics now preserved there.





The Tomb of St. Cuthbert, Durham Cathedral.

(p. 127)



Cross in the Churchyard, Cropthorne-on-Avon.

Photo: Harold Baker,  
Birmingham.



St. Cuthbert's Cross, Durham, found in his tomb.

Photo: M. A. Wilkinson,  
Durham.

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## CHAPTER XV

### THE GOLDEN AGE OF LEARNING

*(Monkwearmouth and Jarrow-on-Tyne in Durham).*

THE last part of the Seventh Century and the first half of the Eighth Century are sometimes described as the Golden Age of early English learning; but it is to the influence of a certain Cilician Greek known as Theodore of Tarsus and his companion Hadrian, a North-African, that this brilliant era owed its inception.

At the Council of Whitby in 664, the English clergy agreed, for the sake of unity, to conform to the calendar and other usages adopted by the ecclesiastical authorities on the Continent; and shortly afterwards "the church of the English nation," as Bede calls it, chose a certain Englishman named Wighard to be their archbishop, and sent him to Rome to be consecrated; but he died in Italy in 665, and thereupon this Hadrian, then abbot of a monastery at Naples, was invited to fill the vacancy.

He, however, asked that his friend Theodore, a monk in Rome, might be chosen in his stead, but agreed to accompany him to Britain and to stay there for a certain period. This was arranged, but there were many delays: Hadrian, for instance, insisted on waiting four months for his hair to

grow, so that he might have it tonsured in the Roman style agreed upon at Whitby, instead of in the Greek fashion customary at his Neapolitan monastery; and later the travellers were held up for months in France owing to various causes.

At last Theodore was enthroned at Canterbury in 669 at the age of 67, and held the archbishopric until his death at 88, in 690. Both he and Hadrian were Greek scholars, and so interested were they in the learning of that people that by their teaching Canterbury soon became famous as a school of Greek literature, at a time when Plato, Aristotle, and all the others went almost unstudied in the rest of western Europe.

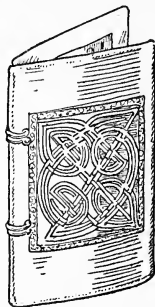
In many ways Theodore is to be regarded as the founder of the Church of England, for he reorganized its bishoprics, and distributed them in much the manner now existing, arranging, too, the order of the services and introducing for the first time proper church music.

In his work he was ably seconded by a certain Englishman named Benedict Biscop, one of the nobles of the court of Ecgfrith, King of Northumbria, son of that King Oswy who had presided at the council of Whitby. This Biscop had given up his worldly possessions and had become a monk; and in 674 he founded the monastery of St. Peter at Monkwearmouth, now a crowded and rather depressing suburb of Sunderland on the Durham coast. This monastery, by the way, was destroyed by the Danes in 866, and nothing of it remains; but amidst the maze of poor streets and houses which now cover this whole area there still stands the Church of St. Peter, a large part of it which

dates from the time of Biscop. The nave, 63 feet long, rises on the original foundations, and the west end with its two narrow windows is more or less as he left it. The tower, too, belongs to the Anglo-Saxon age, though somewhat later; and inside the church are various fragments of the first building. I may mention also the gravestone of Bishop Tidfirth, who died here in 821, which was found in the churchyard and is now in the British Museum.

As an offshoot of Monkwearmouth, Biscop also built the monastery of St. Paul at Jarrow, some 6 miles to the north-west, on the south bank of the Tyne, between Newcastle and South Shields; and five times making the long journey to Rome, he brought back to these two monasteries an extraordinary collection of rich vestments, pictures, books, relics, and so forth, which he had gathered on his travels. He also introduced Continental masons, glass-makers, and craftsmen to adorn the new buildings, and Jarrow in particular is said to have been made beautiful by their work.

Biscop lived to see Jarrow recognized with Canterbury and York as one of the great centres of learning in the western world. When he lay paralysed and dying, he chose a beloved and learned friend of his, named Sigfrith, as a fitting successor, but the latter fell ill also, and in the end



Bone Writing-Tablet  
from  
Blythburgh, Suffolk.  
(Restored).

died a few weeks before Biscop. It is related that the two old men, desiring to see one another for the last time, were carried into the same room and were laid side by side with their heads on one pillow, and that they wanted to kiss one another but were too weak to do so. It was agreed between them, however, that the new abbot should be a certain Ceolfrith, and this man was ultimately so successful in maintaining the fame of Jarrow that by 716 there were 600 brethren in residence.

He died in that year at Langres while on his way to Rome, and at the time was carrying an illuminated manuscript as a present to the Pope; and this fine book, made at Jarrow, and known as the *Codex Amiatinus*, is still preserved at Florence.

Amongst the above-mentioned brethren was the celebrated Baeda, more commonly known as the Venerable Bede, who was born in 673 at or near Monkton, a village a mile south of Jarrow, where there is still a Wishing Well which used to be called Bede's Well. He was trained from the age of seven at Jarrow, and there he lived his whole busy life, becoming in the end the most famous of its scholars and teachers.

He is often spoken of as "The Father of English Learning," and he is known to have written no less than 45 books, dealing with religious matters, history, philosophy, astronomy, physics, medicine, grammar, mathematics, music, and other subjects. His greatest work, however, was his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, in five "Books," which is the source of most of our knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon age down to 731, when it was completed.

This wonderful history, a modern English translation of which may be found in the cheap *Everyman's Library*, is of fascinating interest ; and though it is full of tales of miraculous occurrences at which we can now smile, it records a mass of events and picturesque anecdotes of unquestionable authenticity, and these throw a flood of light upon the manners of the time.

Herein we may fully study the childhood of the English nation, and it may well be a matter of deep satisfaction to us that, thanks to this great old Englishman, our country is far ahead of any other in western Europe in the knowledge of its early history. Through Bede's labours it may be said that the English race makes its appearance on the world's stage in both a more vivid and a more reputable manner than does any other western nation ; and at a bound, so to speak, we thus take our place in front of all other peoples.

The story of Bede's death in the year 735 is most moving. For some time, although he was not much over 60 years of age, he had been ailing and had suffered from loss of breath ; but though he was very weak, and at nights could get little sleep, he would not give in until the book upon which he was engaged had been completed.

He knew that his end was near, and to his pupils he panted : " Learn as fast as you can, for I do not know how long I can last." Then on May 26th, when he had turned from his teaching to finish the dictation of his book, he said to his young secretary : " Take your pen and write quickly," for his hours were numbered.

The secretary, with tears running down his face,

did as he was told, and towards evening the final chapter of the book was all but completed, so that at last the young man was able to say: "Only one sentence remains unwritten, dear master," to which Bede gasped, "Write it quickly."

"It is finished now," said the secretary. "Yes," the dying man replied, "all is finished now," and he sank back upon the ground.

The sun was setting, and the hour of the evening prayer had arrived. Bede therefore told those around him to support him, and, raising himself a little, he recited the "Glory to God." As he reached the last word of the beautiful chant, he passed away.

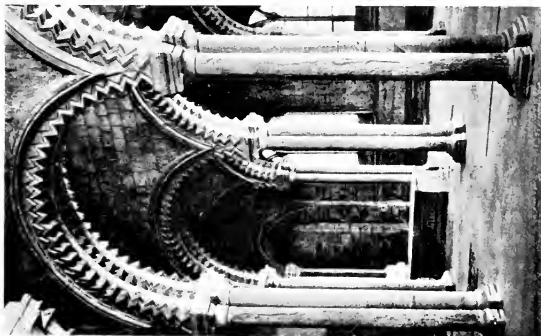


Lower Part of Cross-Shaft from Yarm, Yorkshire, now at Durham.

To-day if you go to

Jarrow you will find only the grim streets of an industrial town where once stood the famous monastery; but in the midst of these, black with grime, there rises the parish Church of St. Paul, originally built by Ceolfrith, the above-mentioned abbot of the monastery. In this church the Latin dedicatory inscription is still preserved, reading: "The dedication of the basilica-church of St. Paul on the 9th of the Kalends of May in the 15th year of King Ecgfrith and in the 4th year of Abbot Ceolfrith, the founder, under God, of the said church." This date, according to our reckoning, is April 23, 685, when





The Tomb of Bede in the Galilee, Durham  
(p. 135)



Bede's Chair, Jarrow.



Bede would have been a boy of about 12 years of age.

The church has been much restored, and this inscription is now fixed in the wall at the west end of the nave, above the arch of the tower, where it is hard to decipher ; but a cast of it is kept in the vestry. In the north porch you may still see more than a score of turned baluster shafts, probably from the original screen before the high altar ; and in the porch also are some pieces of carved crosses dating from this period.

The walls of the Chancel stand practically as they were in the Seventh Century. The two upright slabs of stone built into the east wall, marking the site of the altar, remain just where they were placed by King Ecgfrith himself at the foundation of the church ; and the three windows on the south side, and other features, are of that age.

Near the altar stands a high-backed chair, said to be the actual chair used by Bede ; but unfortunately little chips from it were considered in old days to be of service to expectant mothers, and large parts of the arms have gradually been whittled away for this reason.

Bede's body was buried at Jarrow, but in 1022 the bones which were thought to be his were carried off to Durham Cathedral where they were reinterred in that part of the building called the Galilee Chapel ; and there his tomb is still to be seen. In the Cathedral Library a ring found with the bones is exhibited ; and there is also in the Library a manuscript volume of the Gospels which is said in a Fourteenth Century catalogue to have belonged to this great old scholar of early England's Golden Age.

But though these few remains—his chair, his Bible, his ring, and parts of the church wherein he worshipped—are almost the sole relics of his lifetime left to us, his famous history brings his personality vividly before us, and the enthralling tale he tells of the birth of the English nation will be read with pride by innumerable generations to come.

## CHAPTER XVI

### SOME ANGLO-SAXON MONUMENTS

*(Bewcastle, Gosforth, Irton and Penrith in Cumberland ;  
Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire ; Dewsbury in Yorkshire ;  
Durham, etc.).*

**T**HROUGHOUT the northern and western parts of Britain there are hundreds of stone crosses which date from the Anglo-Saxon epoch, some of them being religious monuments marking holy places and others being grave-stones. They are almost always richly sculptured, sometimes with figures of men and animals, but more generally with complicated decorative patterns and convolutions, such as an endless interlacing of ribbons or snake-like creatures or tendrils of the vine, plaited and looped and twisted in and out, until the stone looks like the most elaborate crochet-work.



A Hog-back Tombstone at Heysham, Lancs.

Some of these sculptured designs have an obviously Celtic or British origin, and are found

both on the Anglo-Saxon crosses in England and on those in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, so that one might think that the English sculptors had derived their art from the Irish through the early missionaries, such as those of Iona, who came from Ireland to Scotland and thence into England, as I have related in previous chapters.

But other designs and themes seem to have had their origin on the Continent, and it is noticeable that the pattern of the divergent spiral, so common in Scotland, does not occur at all on the crosses found in Anglian or English territory. Yet other patterns are thought to be derived from those used by the Romans in their tessellated or mosaic pavements.

Be the origin what it may—and the point remains very undecided—the workmanship is often so highly skilled, and the designs are so involved, that these crosses are marvels of intricacy and beauty, telling of a splendid phase of art which flourished in the Seventh to Eleventh Centuries, and which is the more surprising because it has no clear parent and no descendant.

There are two large crosses of outstanding importance which I must first mention. One of these stands in the churchyard of Bewcastle in Cumberland; but I have seen casts of it in the Tullie House Museum at Carlisle, in the Cathedral Library at Durham, in the South Kensington Museum in London, and elsewhere.

Bewcastle itself is a very remote little place, situated amidst the wild and romantic scenery of the Cumberland uplands, six or seven miles north of the Great Wall and of the high road between

Carlisle and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. To reach it it is best to take the northern road at Brampton, ten miles east of Carlisle, and thence, past Walton, to follow the narrow road which winds its way at last over the border into Scotland.

The village, once of some importance since it stood on the site of a Roman fort, and in later times possessed a castle, now consists of little more than the inn and the church. The cross towers up amidst the tombstones and the trees beside this church : it is made of sandstone, and rises from a great block of stone in which it is socketed. The top is lost, but even so it is nearly 15 feet in height ; and as it dates from about the year 670, it has stood thus for more than 1,250 years, nor have these years done the sculptures upon it much damage.

On one side of the shaft there are three panels containing well-executed figures of St. John the Baptist, the risen Christ, and St. John the Evangelist. On the other side are superb decorations of intertwined branches, amidst which are birds and animals ; and other patterns include scroll and checker-work. On one side is a sundial. There is an inscription upon the shaft which reads : " This slender memorial was set up by Hwaetred and Wothgaer in honour of King Alfrith, son of Oswy." This Oswy was the King of Northumbria from 655 to 671, of whom I have spoken in previous chapters ; and Alfrith reigned under him as sub-king of Deira (Yorkshire), dying, according to tradition, here at Bewcastle.

Another somewhat similar cross of the same date and probably from the same workshop, now stands in the parish church at Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire ;

and casts of it are to be seen in the Museum at Edinburgh, at Durham, in the South Kensington Museum, and elsewhere. In the religious convulsions of the Seventeenth Century it was smashed up by the over-pious Scots who regarded it as a monument of idolatry, but the pieces, which had been buried, were dug up, put together, and erected in the garden of the manse, in 1823; and in 1887 the cross was put under the protection of the Ancient Monuments Act, and was afterwards removed to its present position.

On two sides of the cross, which is nearly 18 feet high, there are fine designs in scroll-work, and on the other sides are sculptured scenes representing the Crucifixion, Annunciation, and so forth. There is also a long inscription, written in Latin and Runic letters, giving part of a religious poem in the North Anglian dialect. The words are supposed to be spoken by the cross itself, which fact, with much other evidence, goes to show, perhaps, that a cross at this time was to our primitive forefathers not far otherwise than a sort of totem or idol having a supernatural individuality of its own, just as in Egypt an obelisk was not only a symbol of the sun-god but was itself a god.

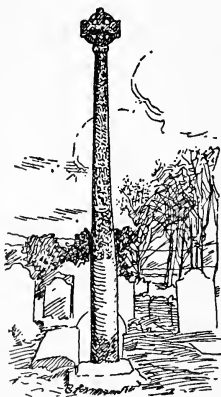
In this inscription the cross is made to say: "God Almighty prepared himself (on His knees) when He was to be crucified; but I, courageous before all men, did not dare to bow. I lifted up the mighty King, Heaven's great Lord, and had not the courage to fall down. They reviled us two both together: me, stained with the blood poured from the man's side, and Christ who was on the cross. Then, hastening thither from afar,



came nobles to Him in grief ; and I who beheld all, I was stricken with the wound of sorrow."

So it goes on ; and the strangeness and importance of the poem does not only lie in its meaning, but also in the fact that it is written in this early English language, although Ruthwell was then part of the British kingdom of Strathclyde which had not been conquered by the Anglo-Saxons. Another version of the same poem has been found in a manuscript now in the Cathedral Library at Vercelli.

At Gosforth in Cumberland there is another famous cross, a slender shaft some 15 feet in height with a four-holed cross at the top. The decorations include the figure of a bound devil, somewhat similar to one which is sculptured on another cross at Kirkby Stephen in Westmorland. Yet another fine cross stands in the churchyard at Irton, also in Cumberland ; and of this and of the Gosforth cross there are casts in the South Kensington Museum. The date of these monuments is thought to be about 700. At Sandbach in Cheshire two fine crosses stand in the Market place, and are said to have been erected by King Peada of Mercia in about the year 655 ; but perhaps they are of somewhat later date.



The Cross at Gosforth,  
Cumberland.

A fine collection of crosses and other memorial-stones of this age is to be seen in the Edinburgh Museum; and amongst these I may mention a large slab of stone, found at Hilton-of-Cadboll on the Moray Firth, not far from Inverness, on which a hunting-scene is sculptured, wherein a woman with long hair is shown, riding side-saddle on a horse while two attendants blow long horns, and mounted huntsmen, carrying spears and shields, pursue a deer which is being attacked by hounds.

It dates from the Ninth Century, but whether it is to be regarded as of indigenous workmanship, or whether it was made by Scandinavian craftsmen, is hard to say. Certainly the sculpture is quite as good as that which is found on late Roman or early mediaeval monuments in Britain.



The Acca Cross at Durham.

Another fine collection is to be seen at Durham, and this includes the famous cross brought from the tomb of Acca, Bishop of Hexham, who died in 740. It is an exquisite piece of work, having most elaborate patterns of

vine-tendrils and bunches of grapes sculptured upon it. I ought to mention also the collection preserved in the parish church at Dewsbury, Yorkshire, which is quite worth seeing.

Besides these crosses a great many tombstones

still exist which are made in what is known as the "hog-back" form. These are blocks of stone standing on their side, the upper edge being curved or arched like the back of a hog, and the front face being usually decorated with elaborate designs. Sometimes at either end there is a figure of a muzzled bear or other animal. They used to be placed over the grave, and are supposed to have represented the roof of the dead man's last home, or possibly the house itself.

At Penrith in Cumberland four of these hog-backs are to be seen in the churchyard at the sides of a tomb now known as the "Giant's Grave," and on one of these the sculptured design shows a serpent representing Satan, on whose head a figure of Christ is treading. Near this tomb is the shaft of a much-damaged cross now called the "Giant's Thumb."

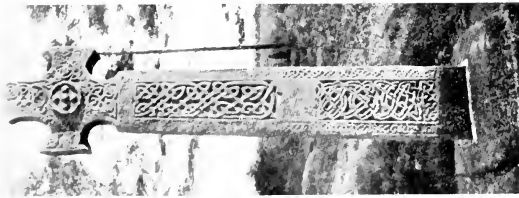
These pieces, or some of them, are thought to belong to the grave of Owain, or Eugenius, a British King, vassal of the Anglo-Saxons who reigned about 920, and who is to be identified with the "Giant" or "Champion" Owen Caesarius of the Inglewood Legends.



Two Hog-back Gravestones at Brompton, Northallerton, Yorks.

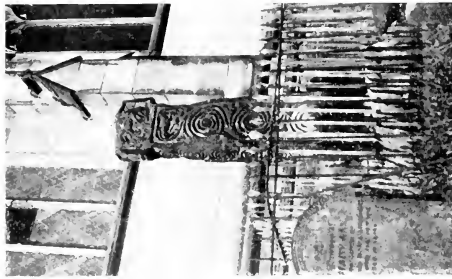
There is a fine collection of "hog-backs" in Brompton Church, Northallerton, Yorks, where also there are some Anglo-Saxon crosses. There are, however, so many "hog-back" tombstones and crosses in the country that I cannot do more than mention here these few outstanding

specimens ; but, as I have said above, the art which they display is of such a high order that the general refinement of the life of this period is apparent, and any idea we may have had of the barbarity of the Anglo-Saxon age fades from the mind. These early English ancestors of ours, whether they brought their stone-workers' art with them or derived it from the British, were evidently men of taste ; and the elaborate and graceful designs they carved in stone could hardly be bettered at the present day.

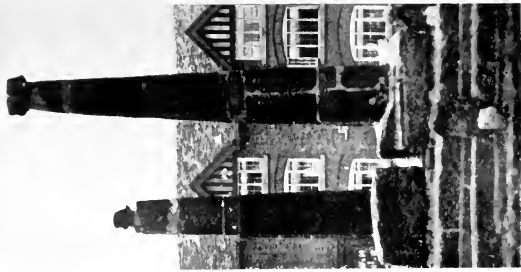


The Cross at Irton.

(p. 141)



The Cross at Bakewell.



The Crosses at Sandbach.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### OFFA OF MERCIA

*(Tamworth in Staffordshire ; Merton in Surrey ; St. Albans in Hertfordshire ; Rhuddlan in Flint ; Offa's Dyke in the West of England, etc.).*

THE outstanding figure of the second half of the Eighth Century in Britain is that of Offa, King of Mercia, who was the contemporary of Charlemagne, the great ruler on the Continent, and reigned from 757 to 796, being fourth in descent from the brother of the famous Penda, the subject of a previous chapter.

The Kingdom of Mercia at that time comprised all the Midlands, from the Thames and Estuary of the Severn on the south to the mouths of the Humber and the Mersey on the north, and from the borders of Wales on the west to those of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex on the east. The inhabitants of this realm were mainly Angles from the east together with some Saxons from the south ; but it is probable that there were many people of British descent in the western half of the country, for it will be remembered that in the reign of Penda it seemed quite natural that the British should fraternise and fight side by side with the Mercians, and remain for many years garrisoned in their territory, while in the Ninth Century we find them united again against the Danes.

During his long reign of nearly forty years Offa

extended the power of Mercia on every side, and in the end was regarded as the overlord of all the Anglo-Saxon realms. His chief residence was at Tamworth in Staffordshire, where his palace is said to have been the wonder of the age. Tamworth is a little town, situated at the junction of the rivers Tame and Anker; and just above the place where the waters meet there is a mound whereon stand the picturesque remains of a mediaeval castle rising amidst the trees. There is perhaps some pre-Norman masonry in the walls of this building, and though it probably dates from 913, when Aethelflaed, daughter of Alfred the Great, fortified the site, some of the earthworks may belong to Offa's residence, though the site of the latter building is sometimes thought to be a little distance away. Certainly the moat which surrounded the town, and which is still visible in places, was made by Offa, and even to-day it is spoken of as Offa's, or the King's, Ditch.

In Tudor and Jacobean days a manor-house was erected inside the castle walls; and the principal rooms of this building are now open to the public, and are used as a museum, from the windows of which you may look for miles across the flat Staffordshire country where once Offa's subjects dwelt; but after all these centuries of occupation and reconstruction the traces of the Mercian royal palace are not easy to find, though I may draw the visitor's attention to the old causeway across the moat, where some "herringbone" masonry which may be Anglo-Saxon is still visible.

In the year 774 Offa defeated a Kentish army at Otford, near Sevenoaks, and the kingdom of Kent





became tributary to him. In 777 he defeated Cynewulf, King of Wessex, at Benson, at the foot of the Chilterns, near Dorchester-on-Thames, and annexed a wide area of West Saxon territory.

The heroic story of the death of this Cynewulf some years later is recorded in such detail in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and so clearly reveals the reckless gallantry of the age, that I must speak of it here in passing. He had gone, it seems, to visit a lady with whom he was in love who lived at Merton in Surrey; and, owing to the romantic nature of his errand he had taken with him as a retinue only a few of his friends, including one who was a Briton from Wales.

A certain bold prince named Cyneard, who believed himself to have a right to the throne, was at the time in revolt against him; and, being in the neighbourhood and hearing that Cynewulf was so thinly attended, he galloped over to Merton with a number of his men, and suddenly surrounded the house, intending, one may suppose, to kidnap the King, his rival.

Cynewulf, however, dauntlessly brave, snatched up his sword, and, rushing single-handed from the lady's room, flung himself at Cyneard, whom he wounded severely; but the rebels closed in on him and he fell dead under a rain of blows.

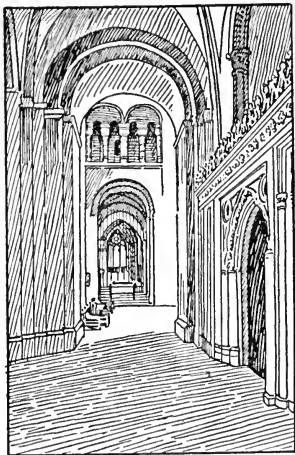
Hearing the noise the King's friends, who were in another part of the house, ran out, only to find their sovereign lying lifeless in the courtyard, whereupon Cyneard called on them to acknowledge him King, promising them wealth and position; but they, though outnumbered and trapped, would not listen, and in the ensuing fight they all lost

their lives, except the Briton who, being terribly hurt, was left for dead, yet afterwards recovered. The wounded Cyneard, unable to move, was forced to spend the night with his companions at the house ; but early next morning, the dead king's men arrived unexpectedly on the scene and ordered them to surrender. The rebels, now trapped in their turn, replied that they were just as ready to die for Cyneard as the men slain on the previous day had been to die for Cynewulf ; and thereat the royal officers broke into the house, where, after a stiff fight, Cyneard and his party were all killed.

The body of Cynewulf was carried to Winchester where it was buried, and that of Cyneard was interred at Axminster, and the matter was closed—being just an incident in the gallant tale of those stirring days, yet one which warms the heart to read of, for it reveals the death-disdaining loyalty and devotion alike of Englishman and Briton, and their most engaging tenacity of purpose, already set deep in the national character. It is an incident wherein we may see one of the first appearances of the bulldog.

To return to Offa : in ecclesiastical matters he made his influence powerfully felt ; and disliking the fact that his clergy were under the orders of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and desiring to have a head of the church resident in his own kingdom of Mercia, he called a great council at Chelsea in 787, whereat, after a heated argument, it was agreed that an archbishopric of Mercia should be established at Lichfield, seven miles from his palace at Tamworth. The consent of Rome to this was obtained ; and Offa agreed to send every year to

the Pope 365 gold coins to be used in providing the lights in St. Peter's and for charitable purposes. This was probably the origin of the famous "Peter's pence," and it is interesting to note that some of Offa's coins have been found in Rome.



Saxon Balusters Built into the Wall of St. Alban's Abbey, Herts.

Offa, by the way, was the first King to mint the silver penny, or *denarius*, in Britain; and specimens of this coin are to be seen in the British Museum.

In 793 Offa founded the famous monastery at St. Albans, placing there an abbot and one hundred Benedictine monks. In my book *Wanderings in Roman Britain*,

chapter xii, I related how a Christian Roman soldier named Albanus had been beheaded during the religious persecution of the year 303; how a shrine had been erected to his memory on a hill close to the city of Verulamium, where he had lived; and how this shrine was visited by Germanus in 428, and was supposed to mark the site of the martyr's grave.

Offa made this shrine the nucleus of his new building; and having dug up some bones which were supposed to be those of Albanus, he placed them in a costly reliquary which became the main feature of the abbey church. In 1077 the great abbey of St. Albans was built upon the site, but some of the balusters of Offa's time were built into the wall of the south transept, where you may see them at the present day.

It seems likely that Offa also founded or restored the monastery on what was then Thorney Island, near London, which under the hands of Edward the Confessor and later kings, developed into Westminster Abbey; but of this I will speak in a future chapter.

The western frontier of Mercia always caused the King much anxiety, for the British in Wales could neither be decisively defeated nor kept within their own territory. At last he decided to dig a trench and throw up a rampart beside it along the whole length of the frontier; and this great work, 140 miles long, is still to be seen in many places, and is called to this day Offa's Dyke.

In the South it begins at the mouth of the river Wye which flows into the Estuary of the Severn opposite Bristol; and you may trace it as it crosses the beautiful Sedbury Park, two miles from Chepstow. Thence it follows the east bank of the Wye to a point a few miles west of Hereford, and so past Knighton, Clun, and Montgomery to the Severn again, near Welshpool. Proceeding northwards it then runs by Chirk and Ruabon into Flint, and reaches the mouth of the Dee some six miles north of Mold, and twelve miles of Chester.

You can see it best, perhaps, in the neighbourhood of Clun in Shropshire, where it passes across the wild hill-country like a gigantic furrow. Amidst these uplands it is a well-defined trench, twenty feet wide, and as much as that in depth if one reckons from the top of the embankment ; but in less open country it is not so clear, and here and there for miles together it is now wholly lost.

The British, of course, greatly resented the cutting of this tremendous boundary-line, and on one occasion they made a concerted attempt to destroy it, in answer to which Offa led a punitive expedition against them in 795. A great fight took place within sound of the sea near Rhuddlan, behind Rhyl, where a wide stretch of marsh land, now mostly drained, came down to the beach ; and in the battle the popular British King Caradoc was killed, while a terrible slaughter of his men took place, the memory of which is still preserved in the plaintive Welsh national song called " Morfa Rhuddlan."

In the Ninth Century King Ecgbert made a law imposing the penalty of death on any Briton of Wales who should be caught on the Anglo-Saxon side of the dyke ; and just before the Norman conquest King Harold decreed that any Briton who should be found bearing arms on the east side of the dyke should have his right hand cut off by the officers of the law, which indicates that the Welsh cattle-raiders were busy and had to be checked.

In connection with Offa one other matter of interest may be mentioned here. The King had a beautiful daughter named Eadburh who was

married to the vassal-king Beorhtric ; but this man had a young friend who by some means so offended Eadburh that in a fit of rage she placed a cup of poison on the table for him to drink. As luck would have it, however, her husband, instead of the proposed victim, drank it and died, at which she fled in horror to France, where the Emperor Charlemagne, taking pity on her, put her safely away in a nunnery.

But she was not made for a godly life, and her conduct so shocked the nuns that at last she was expelled ; and Asser, King Alfred's biographer, tells us that he had heard both from Alfred himself and from several English travellers that in the end she was seen in rags and tatters begging her bread in the streets of Pavia, in Lombardy. Offa's only son died shortly after his father, leaving no heir, and thus this tragic beggar-princess was the last of the Mercian royal line.

Pavia stood on the pilgrim road to Rome, and St. Boniface, writing about 747, says that there were a great many English women of bad morals in the city, and indeed in many other cities of Lombardy and France. I may mention that Aethelsrith, sister of Alfred the Great, died and was buried at Pavia.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SOME SURVIVING CHURCHES

*(Greenstead in Essex ; Earl's Barton in Northamptonshire ; Sompting in Sussex ; Escombe in Durham ; Dover in Kent ; Wing in Buckinghamshire ; and Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire).*

**A**N immense number of churches throughout the country still exhibit traces of Anglo-Saxon workmanship: here a window, there a door, here some courses of masonry, there a part of the foundations. But there are a few also which have not largely been rebuilt, and whose walls have survived almost intact down to the present day.

I have already described one of these at Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex and another—St. Martin's—at Canterbury. Now I must say a word or two about the little church of St. Andrew at Greenstead, a mile from Chipping Ongar, in Essex.

Though the chancel is a Norman addition to the original structure, and the wooden tower and spire at the west end of the building date from about 1400, the nave stands more or less as it was built, perhaps as much as 1,200 or 1,250 years ago.

This long survival of the building, which has been in more or less continuous use since Anglo-Saxon days, is the more surprising because, as you may clearly see from the outside, it is simply a primitive log-hut, the walls being composed of split oak-trees placed upright and close together, a row



of about two dozen of these making the length of one of the sides of the church. The curved sides of the split logs form the rough outer face of the walls, and the flat surfaces form the smooth inner face, which was probably plastered.



Greenstead Church, Essex.

The logs are just under 6 feet in height, but are raised upon a sort of sill at the bottom, into which they are fixed with wooden pins; and a wooden tongue joins each log to the next. The roof rises at a steep angle from the line of the tops of these logs.

In 1848 a certain amount of restoration was carried out, a few new logs being inserted in place of those which had decayed, and the sill or foundation being rebuilt; but substantially the

structure remained as it was, so that one may truly say that the old timber has heard the same words of divine worship spoken by the East Saxons in the Anglo-Saxon tongue as now, some 40 generations later, it hears spoken in English by the men of Essex.

An incident in the history of this ancient church may be mentioned. In the year 870 the Viking invaders killed King Edmund of East Anglia near Thetford, as I shall relate in another chapter ; and after his death he was canonized as a saint, and became one of the most popular miracle-workers in the country. His body rested for many years in London, but in 1013 it was carried to Bury St. Edmund's, so named in memory of him ; and on the journey it was placed for the night in the nave of this church at Greenstead, which on that account was regarded with particular reverence, this perhaps being the reason why the original structure was never pulled down and rebuilt in mediaeval times. It is thought by some that the church was built for this event, but personally I think that it must have been already in existence.

The mediaeval church at Earl's Barton, six or seven miles from Northampton, has at its west end an Anglo-Saxon tower which is generally regarded as one of the two or three most important architectural monuments of this period in all England. It is an astonishing structure ; and as seen sometimes, rising with the sunlight upon it from the sloping grassy spaces of the churchyard where grow little groups of dark cypress trees, it strikes the eye in a truly startling manner.

It is built in four stages, decreasing somewhat

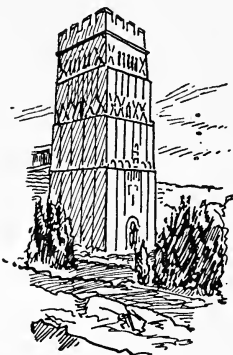
in size, and each having elaborate decorations formed of strips of patterned stone-work projecting from the flat surface. The whole tower is some seventy feet in height ; but at the top there are now battlements where once rose the original tiled roof. A fine doorway leads into the tower, and there are windows lighting the different stages, while in the uppermost storey there are rows of baluster shafts with open spaces between.

It dates from somewhere about 980, and is thus nearly a thousand years old ; yet there it stands, unharmed by time, to tell us of the skill of the English masons in the days when the Normans were yet unheard of.

Another tower, of about the same date but of very different character, is to be seen at Sompting, near Worthing in Sussex. The tower itself is

plainer in style, but the roof is more elaborate, and rises from the four gables to a low steeple. The archway inside the tower, with its side-pillars having decorated capitals, is an excellent example of the work of this age.

One of the most perfect examples of an Anglo-Saxon church is that of St. John, at Escombe in Durham, close to the town of Bishop Auckland. Escombe, or Eda's Comb as it was called in those



Tower of Earl's Barton Church,  
Northamptonshire.

days, is now a bleak little mining village set in a *comb*, or valley, beside the river Wear; and the church, which has no tower, is partly hidden by the wall which surrounds its graveyard.

The small nave and the little chancel, only 10 feet square, are entirely built of masonry taken from the Roman fortress of Vinovia or Binovia, renamed by the Anglo-Saxons Binchester, which is less than two miles away. The church was erected somewhere about 700 or 750, and the chancel arch is so obviously a piece of Roman building that we must suppose it to have been one of the gateways of Vinovia, removed stone by stone after the arrangement of the blocks had been noted, and rebuilt in exactly the same manner.

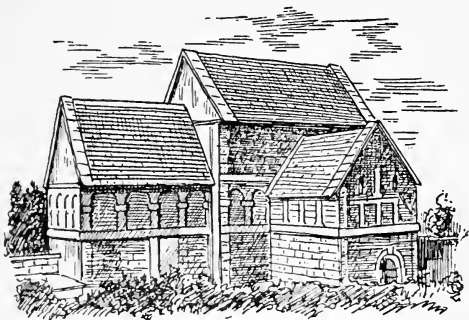
One of the stones in the wall still bears the words LEG. VI, "Sixth Legion," inscribed now upside down upon it; and another seems to have been part of a Roman altar.

The five original windows, small and set high up, still exist, but others have been let into the walls in later times; and a porch and door on the south side have been added, though the original door on the north side also remains.

Part of the Anglo-Saxon cobbled pavement is to be seen near the font, which itself is of that date and stands on a block of stone of Roman work; and near by you may also see the fragments of a memorial cross with a sculptured design of the kind found on such monuments of the Seventh and Eighth Centuries.

On the cliffs of Dover, within the walls of the castle, there stands the church of St. Mary-in-Castro which has been restored and is now used by the

garrison for divine service, after having been for long a roofless coal-hole. This ancient building was erected in the early part of the Seventh Century or possibly even earlier, and a great deal of Roman material was used in its construction, some of which was doubtless taken from the ruins of the great Pharos or Lighthouse built here by the Caesars.\*



Saxon Church at Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts.

This Roman lighthouse, the lower part of which is still standing, adjoins the west end of the Saxon church, and was evidently used as its tower; and looking from the one building to the other, you can see that the masonry is the same in both. It is a very impressive thought that Englishmen still perform their devotions here within these walls which have looked down on their Anglo-Saxon forefathers of 1,300 years ago kneeling at prayer on the same spot and in the same faith.

\* *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 183.

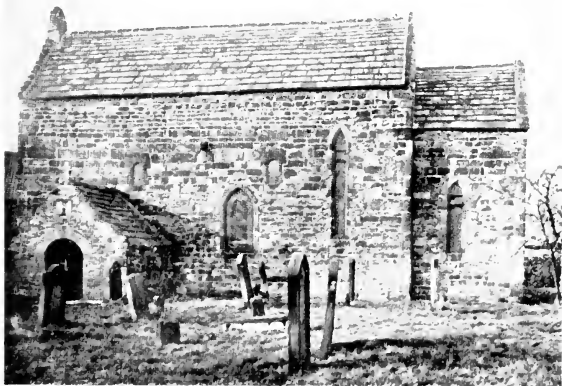
Another interesting church, dating from the Eighth Century, is to be seen at Wing, Buckinghamshire, some three miles from Leighton Buzzard. The important feature here is a raised apse or chancel beneath which is a dark crypt where the bones of saints or other sacred relics were kept in a central chamber, the so-called *confessio*. There is a passage passing round it for the use of pilgrims, who could look at the lamp-lit relics through apertures in the walls, and make their prayers, before moving on round into the church again.

But I suppose the most perfect example of an Anglo-Saxon church in England is that which is now to be seen in the picturesque little town of Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire, near the borders of Somerset, about eight miles from Bath. Until the middle of the Nineteenth Century this small grey stone building was lost amongst the jumble of stone houses of the Middle Ages which had grown up around it; and part of it was used as a school-house, while another part actually formed the residence of a widow, now dead, who dwelt there wholly unconscious of its sanctity or its immense age.

The building, which stands on the slope of the hill, just to the north of the Twelfth Century parish church, is probably that which William of Malmesbury mentions as having been erected here just before the year 700 by Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne, who died in 709, though arguments have been brought forward to suggest that it belongs to a later period of the Anglo-Saxon epoch. This Aldhelm, who was a relative of King Ine of Wessex, was born no more than two centuries after



The Church in Dover Castle with the Roman Lighthouse at West End.  
(p. 158)



The Church at Escombe.

(p. 157)





the retirement of the Roman legions from Britain, and not much more than a generation after the final collapse of Roman civilization in our country, which fact will demonstrate to the reader the great interest of this church as a link with the remote ages of British history.

He was buried at Malmesbury, a score or so of miles north of Bradford-on-Avon, where he had founded the abbey which was the parent of the Twelfth Century building now to be seen there in ruins ; and this church at Bradford seems to have been one of the places where his body rested on its journey from the Somersetshire village of Doultong, near Shepton Mallet, and about eight miles from Wells, where he died, to its eventual tomb. At each of these resting-places a memorial cross was set up ; and here at Bradford you may still see fragments of such a cross preserved in the porch of the church.

After his death Aldhelm was canonized as a saint, and various accounts of his life were written in which his piety and his scholarship are extolled, and tales are told of his good works and his miracles. He was the first Englishman to write in Latin verse ; and he also wrote poetry in his native Anglo-Saxon, and set it to his own music. Amongst his writings is a set of 101 riddles composed in Latin hexameters, which once were thought to be very clever ; and we have a letter of his written to a British King, admonishing him for not conforming to the customs of the Church of Rome.

These writings of his throw considerable light on the manners of the Seventh Century, and give us some idea of the luxury of the age, as, for example,

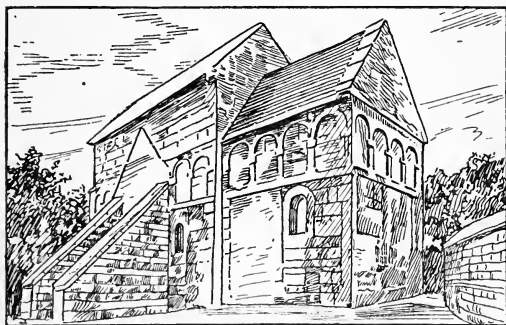
when he censures the court ladies for waving their hair by means of curling-tongs and putting too much rouge on their cheeks, and speaks of the very nuns wearing beautiful dresses instead of the garb of their order; or again when he writes of the churches of the period as having cloth of gold on their altars, golden crosses and chalices studded with gems, beautiful glass in their windows, and fine organs of many pipes.

On the other hand some of the tales reveal the absurd simplicity of the time. One such story, for instance, relates that once while Aldhelm was staying in Rome, his attention was called to a certain new-born baby, a foundling, whose father according to the scandal-mongers, was the Pope. Aldhelm baptized the child when it was but nine days old, and he took this opportunity of clearing the Pope's name. He held the child up before the assembled company and asked it sternly whether the Pontiff was its father, so arranging matters that it appeared—I suppose by its lusty cries—to deny this parentage with much indignation. Thereupon, the gossipers admitted that the allegations were unfounded, at which the Pope was so relieved that he gave Aldhelm all manner of rich presents.

This small church of his at Bradford-on-Avon, with its fine architectural features, is almost perfectly preserved, except that the porch on the south side has been destroyed, and the visitor now enters directly into the nave. This nave, stoutly built of exposed masonry, is a mysterious little place, originally lit by only one small window high high up in the south wall, but now having two new

windows let into the west end for the benefit of visitors.

On the north side there is a porch which was entered by an arched doorway so narrow that but one person at a time could pass through it ; this being, I suppose, like the absence of more windows, a measure of defence against the ill-disposed. Through the arch at the east end you look into a dim little chancel, where now stands a modern altar, lit again by a single small window ; and high above this arch there are two sculptured figures of flying angels, somewhat similar to the sculptured angel of the same date which is to be seen in the Cathedral at Manchester.



Saxon Church at Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts.

Churches such as these I have mentioned here, and those I shall speak of in Chapter XXV, bring vividly before us the activities of our remote Anglo-Saxon forefathers. Here in these ancient buildings we may stand to-day with the inspiring

tale of 1,200 years and more incorporated in the walls around us ; and thus the long continuity of our tremendous story is made astonishingly apparent. It is the enormous length of this continuity of ordered life in Britain which is of such psychological importance to the mind.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE ANGLO-SAXON LANGUAGE, AND SOME CUSTOMS AND INSTITUTIONS

AT this point it will be convenient to say a few words in regard to the Anglo-Saxon language which is the parent of our modern speech ; for the original form of that tongue is generally regarded as having lasted only down to about the period with which we are now dealing.

The group of languages known as Teutonic is divided into High German and Low German. The former was the language spoken in the higher parts of Germany, that is to say in those parts far back from the sea ; and the latter, in its various forms, was spoken in what may be called the Lowlands, that is to say near the coasts of the North Sea. To-day, High German means the German tongue as we now know it ; and Low German includes Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Flemish, Dutch, and others.

It is to this Low German group that the Anglo-Saxon language, and its descendant the *Aenglisc* or English tongue, belong. The invaders originally spoke three or four dialects of the same language : namely that used by the Angles in Northumbria ; that used by the Mercians of the Midlands, who were mainly Angles ; that of the people of Wessex, who were Saxons ; and that of the people of Kent, who were Jutes. These were all one language, the

language spoken by the old Saxon peoples on the Continent ; but they each had certain words and distinct pronunciations of their own, and the term " Anglo-Saxon " really means a combination of the dialects of the Saxon language spoken in England as distinct from the Saxon language spoken on the Continent. In other words, one might say simply that " Anglo-Saxon " means the Continental Saxon tongue as spoken in England. But since the bulk of the existing Anglo-Saxon literature belongs to the Kingdom of Wessex the dialect of that region has come to be regarded as more representative than the others, though actually modern English seems to have a closer relationship to the dialect of Mercia.

There are three periods of Anglo-Saxon to be recognized : the Early, which extends down to the time of Alfred the Great, of whom I shall speak in the next chapters ; the Late, which carries us on to about the Norman Conquest ; and the Transitional, which extends down to about 1200. For the greater part of these periods one also speaks of the language as Old English ; and for the period between about 1200 and 1500 our tongue is called Middle English. After 1500 the language is so similar to that spoken to-day that it is generally classed as Modern English.

As a matter of fact, pure Anglo-Saxon only exists down to about the period already reached in this book, and with the advent of the Danes, of whom I am going to speak in the subsequent chapters, many new words begin to creep in. Up to this point there had not been very many words derived from Latin, and those which had entered

Showing the chief places  
named in this Book.

Showing the chief places  
named in this Book.



the language had either been brought in by the Romanized clergy, or else had been picked up from the Latin-speaking Britons whom the Anglo-Saxons had conquered. But from this time onwards Latin words were adopted more frequently, and during the first years after the Norman Conquest they came into the language with a rush, partly direct, and partly through the medium of French.

Towards the end of the Fifteenth Century the revival of Latin scholarship in England led to the introduction of still more Latin words, and now, also, many Greek words began to be adopted. But the structure of the language and its grammar remained essentially Anglo-Saxon, which, therefore, is to be regarded as the true parent of English, in spite of the fact that such vast numbers of the words in use to-day are borrowed from Latin, Greek, and many other tongues.

The relationship between Anglo-Saxon and modern English will best be seen if I give here a few words from each, chosen at random and set side by side, as follows :

<i>Anglo-Saxon. English.</i>		<i>Anglo-Saxon. English.</i>	
Aeft	After	Aefen	Even, evening
Aefre	Ever	Bacan	To Bake
Beran	To bear	Bed	Bed
Bill	Bill (axe)	Blind	Blind
Bindan	To Bind	Bítan	To bite
Bláwan	To blow	Brecan	To break
Brún	Brown	Byrnan	To burn
Can	Can	Corn	Corn
Cocc	Cock	Cropp	Crop
Daél	Deal	Dragan	To drag



<i>Anglo-Saxon. English.</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon. English.</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon. English.</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon. English.</i>
Drincan	To drink	Dreópan	To drop
Etan	To eat	Feówer	Four
Fleótan	To float	Foda	Food
Fót	Foot	Ful	Fool
Geát	Gate	Gitan	To get
Gold	Gold	Gód	Good
Grund	Ground	Háeth	Heath
Grípan	To grip	Hand	Hand
Healdan	To hold	Hoppian	To hop
Laessa	Less	Laet	Late
Leáf	Leaf	Lifian	Life
Metan	To meet	Mówan	To mow
Néah	Near	Nósu	Nose
Nest	Nest	Nú	Now
Rúm	Room	Raedan	To read
Ram	Ram	Rídan	To ride
Rowan	To row	Singan	To sing
Slahan	To slay	Spinnan	To spin
Storm	Storm	Smítan	To smite
Tredan	To tread	Treówe	True
Wácan	To wake	Waepen	Weapon
Waeter	Water	Warre	War
Weder	Weather	Wíf	Wife
Willan	To will	Wyrcean	To work
Word	Word	Wind	Wind

So much for the language ; and as I have interrupted the narrative of events in order to speak of it, I may as well discuss here one or two other matters. In the first place let me say a few words in regard to the clothes worn by our forefathers of this period, so that we may the more clearly picture the individuals whom our story conjures up before us.

The wealthy Anglo-Saxon usually wore over his shirt (sometimes called a *smoc*) a linen or woollen

tunic reaching nearly to the knees, fastened with metal clasps at the wrists, and held about the waist by a jewelled girdle, then spelt *gyrdel*. His legs were generally covered by loose linen breeches, called *brec*, which were bound around in criss-cross fashion by bands, sometimes gilded, passing up from his leather shoes or *scoh*. A cloak was fastened about him, held by an ornamental brooch at the shoulder.



A Figure from the Benedictional of St. Æthelwold.

On the head a hat (*hact*) or cap of Phrygian shape was usually worn; and stout gloves (*glof*) sometimes covered the hands. Stockings, called *hosa*, were later introduced, and garments of silk (*seoluc*) presently came into fashion; while a short coat (*roc*) was occasionally used. The hair was worn long, being plaited at the sides; and the chin was sometimes shaved, and sometimes covered by a beard.

The women wore a long-sleeved robe, passing down to the feet, over an under-garment; and sometimes there was a second robe, sleeveless, and worn over the other, being girdled at the waist. Over all was a cloak or mantle which was thrown around the shoulders somewhat in the Greek manner. Their heads were covered with a light wrap; and they carried "vanity bags" in their hands, and wore a considerable amount of jewellery—necklaces, bracelets, and rings, besides strings of beads.

They often rouged their cheeks, and waved their hair with curling tongs.

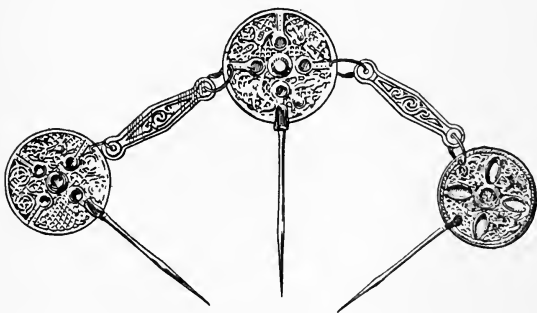
The skeletons found in the cemeteries seem to show that the men and women were of much the same height as ourselves ; but for the most part they were fair-haired and blue-eyed. The extraordinary confusion of types, and the great diversity of complexions and colour of the hair seen at the present day, are due to the variety of strains from which our modern blood is derived. We are an astonishing mixture to-day, many of us including in our ancestry not only Anglo-Saxon, but British, Irish, Scotch, Pictish, Roman, Danish, French, Dutch, and other elements ; but at the time with which we are dealing the fair Teutonic type was paramount, and the Celtic and Roman strains were only gradually being introduced by intermarriage with the remnants of the conquered race.

Now let me add a few words in regard to some of the important Anglo-Saxon institutions.

Our Anglo-Saxon forefathers were expert farmers and when they were not at war they were busily occupied upon the land. They reared most of the domestic animals to be seen to-day, and I may mention that bees were extensively kept. They were keen huntsmen, fond of their dogs and horses, and falconry was a popular sport. Circumstances obliged them to go campaigning with their King from time to time, but they were happier at home, and, indeed, their peace-loving disposition impelled great numbers towards the quiet life of the church and monastery.

Generally speaking the people were divided into two classes : the *eorls*, or nobles, and the *ceorls*, or

freemen ; but in some parts of the country a third class, the *laets*, or tributary dependents, were recognized, and there were also the slaves. An ordinary prosperous freeman generally owned what was called a *hide*, that is to say an area of land of about sixty to one hundred acres, that being the area usually reckoned as sufficient to maintain the owner's household and family in comfortable circumstances. A hundred *hides* formed a unit known as a *Hundred*, a term we still use, and these hundred households were supposed to supply that number of trained soldiers to the crown when they were needed.



A Set of Silver Pins from Lincolnshire.

These *Hundreds* were presided over by a head-man known as a *reeve* ; and in later days, when the large shires or counties began to appear, there was a *shire-reeve*, a word which has now become *sheriff*. Each shire, too, had its *ealdorman*,

corresponding to one of the important Barons of Norman times.

Each *hide*, or family estate, provided employment and subsistence for a large number of *laets* and slaves ; and these were often of British race, the *laets* in the South, for instance, being sometimes termed *wealh*, or “alien,” a word which is the origin of the name “Welsh.”

The King had his *thegns* or ministers, and his particular retinue of friends. He ruled through a sort of parliament, called the *Witan*, or *Witan-Gemót*, composed of his own nominees, and to some extent he had to take their advice, for on more than one occasion they proved quite strong enough to depose their sovereign and to elect a successor of their own choice.

Punishments for offences against the law usually took the form of fines, and the extent of these was carefully set out in books of *dooms* or “judgments,” 300 gold pieces, for instance, having to be paid by one who had had the misfortune to kill an *eorl*, 100 pieces by one who had killed a *ceorl*, and so forth. A robber, if caught, had to pay back the value of the articles stolen multiplied by a figure strictly graded according to the rank of the person robbed : if his theft was of church property he had to pay back twelve times the value ; if he had robbed the King he had to pay the amount back ninefold ; if the theft had been from a priest, the return was also to be ninefold ; if from a freeman it was threefold ; and so forth.

There were *dooms* for every sort of offence, and the particular care with which those for manslaughter or murder were detailed shows

that the Anglo-Saxon was quite as ready to lift his weapon against any man who aroused his wrath as was his descendant in the duelling days of not so long ago. In that respect, indeed, he was almost as silly as a modern American gunman. Quarrelling or brawling were offences for which fines were imposed, but if a fight were to break out in the King's presence, the life of the instigator might be forfeit, since such a squabble might endanger the sovereign himself, whose skin, at best, was never very safe, in view of the fact that he was expected to fight personally in battle, and battles were frequent.

When Christianity had taken a firm hold upon the nation the bishops became the most important personages in the land, and there were many laws directed towards the maintenance of the sanctity of the Church and towards the observance of religious codes. There were fines, for example, for not keeping the Sabbath, for not having a child baptised, and so on ; and, on the other hand, a church became at an early date a place of refuge to which a miscreant could fly for safety.

To conclude these brief notes of explanation before returning to the main theme, I must say a word in regard to the characters used in writing. The Anglo-Saxons employed at first the Runic characters, which are thought to have been derived from Greek and Latin letters, and which were known to all the Teutonic peoples on the Continent. But during the Eighth Century these Runic letters, or Runes as they are called, passed out of general use in England, with the exception of three letters, one of which, *th*, is the origin of

the letter like a *y*, but really pronounced *th*, retained in *ye* (the) till the Eighteenth Century.

Side by side with these Runic characters a Roman script was also used, and sometimes an inscription is written in both; but gradually the latter entirely replaced the former.

F A D R R X P H + I + 2 C Y T B M X H I M P Q R F A Y  
F U T H O R C G W H N I J I P X S T B E N G D L M C E A A E Y E a  
A H

The Runic Alphabet Inscribed on a Knife Found in the Thames.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE VIKINGS

ON the Continent it is proverbially said that "the English are defeated in every battle except the last." Now this exaggerated but witty saying need cause us no offence, for it means simply that the steadiness of our nerves and our powers of endurance are deemed to be greater than those of other peoples, and that though at first we may receive a terrible gruel, owing to our national dislike of the attitude of being prepared for war, we may be expected to survive the first shocks and to come out at last on top.

The history of our nation provides a number of instances which prove the basic truth of this most piquant proverb, but there is none which better demonstrates our almost uncanny ability to win in the end than the tale of the Viking invasions; for the story shows the country beaten to its knees, and yet at last victorious. The generations of our forefathers who lived through those terrible times could never have believed it possible that the continuous and frightful onslaughts of the Vikings would one day be regarded as a mere incident in the unfolding story of our race; yet such is the fact, and to-day, looking back, we see the seemingly irresistible invaders finally dispersed and the old British lion licking his wounds, as a hundred times he has





The Church at Bradford-on-Avon. (p. 160)



The Screen in Winchester Cathedral whereon are caskets containing bones of Saxon Kings. (p. 201)



licked them since, in sole possession of the field.

The name "Vikings" or "People of the *Vik*, or Creek," reveals the origin of the invaders; for the *Vik* was the Skager Rack which passes northwards into Norway by the inlet whereon the city of Christiania now stands, and southwards into the Cattegat between Sweden and Denmark. But in their relationship to Britain these people were spoken of in a general way as "Danes," and it seems that they were closely akin, both in blood and in speech, to the Angles and Jutes who had migrated from Denmark to Britain in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries.

These latter, however, had become Christians in their new home, and, as we have seen in the previous chapters, had developed into a very fairly civilized group of nations: whereas the Vikings had remained pagans, worshippers of Woden and the old gods, and incessant fighting amongst themselves had left them, at the beginning of the Ninth Century, even more warlike than were their Anglo-Saxon kinsmen of three or four hundred years earlier.

The great historian Green terms them "Englishmen bringing back to an England that had forgotten its origins the barbaric England of its pirate forefathers"; and though the relationship to the Anglo-Saxons in Britain thus implied is perhaps closer than our present knowledge warrants, we may say at any rate that the main difference between the earlier invaders who now were defending Britain, and these later Vikings who now were attacking it, was one of religion and upbringing rather than of breed and character.

The earliest recorded expedition of these Vikings to our shores took place in the year 789, when three shiploads of them landed on the coast. The English sheriff went down to the seashore to find out who they were, and was about to arrest them when they set upon him and his men, killed them, and pushed off once more. Then, in 793, there was a more serious Viking attack when, in their long black boats, taking advantage of a spell of fine weather, they issued forth from their fiords at mid-winter, and adventured across the open sea, landing on Lindisfarne, or Holy Island, off the Northumbrian coast, where they sacked the monastery.

Previous to their coming, so the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us, "came dreadful forewarnings in the land of the Northumbrians, terrifying the people—immense sheets of light rushing through the air, and cyclones, and fiery 'dragons' flying across the firmament, these tremendous portents being soon followed by a great famine."

In the following year these pirates came again, and plundered the monastery of Monkwearmouth, on the Durham coast; but there they suffered a disaster, for a storm wrecked some of their ships, and those of their crews who were not drowned were killed as they reached the shore.

It is not easy to decide how best to bring before the reader's imagination the terrible menace which these first raids foreshadowed; but perhaps my purpose will be achieved if I give a bare list of the most serious Viking attacks in the following years.

In 795 pirate bands, probably Norwegians in

this case and not Danes, appeared off the east coast of Ireland with a fleet of a hundred boats, and, landing on the Isle of Rechru, now called Lambay, north of Dublin Bay, sacked the monastery founded there by Columba more than two centuries earlier.

In 798 they ravaged the Isle of Man, and in 802 they raided Columba's famous monastery on the Isle of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland. Four years later they returned to this sacred spot and completely wrecked it, murdering the 68 monks who were living there, and making off with the treasures presented by ten generations of kings.

In 807 these Norwegian Vikings appeared on the west coast of Ireland, and destroyed the monastery of Innishmurray, off Sligo; and it seems that they now used the route from Norway which crosses 200 miles of open sea to the Shetlands, and then passes down the west coast of Scotland. From 812 onwards for 20 years and more they roamed over Ireland, plundering and destroying as they went; and in 823 they paid another visit to Iona, and again sacked the monastery.

In 834 a swarm of Danish Vikings raided the mouth of the Rhine, and sacked Dorstadt and Utrecht; and in that same year they returned to England for the first time since 794, landing on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent.

It is hard to say why England itself had escaped their attentions between 794 and 834; but it is known that from 812 onwards a pact of peace existed between the Danes and the Franks, and

it may be that the Anglo-Saxons in Britain were also included in this pact, but that the Norwegians who were then harrying Ireland and the west coast of Scotland were outside the scope of the treaty. The museums of Norway, I may mention, contain many specimens of metal-work of this period, which are now recognised as loot from Ireland.

In 836 and 837 the Danish Vikings sacked Antwerp, and in the latter year they raided Charmouth, near Lyme Regis in Dorset, but were routed at Hingston Down, near Plymouth by the West Saxons under King Egbert, the grandfather of Alfred the Great, a fine old warrior who was 70 years of age at the time.

In 841 the Vikings appeared in the Wash, and having raided East Anglia, turned their attention to Kent; while in the same year they captured and looted Rouen. In 842 London and Rochester in England and Quentovic in Picardy fell to them; and in 844 we find them not only raiding the lands of the Northumbrians, whose King fell in battle against them, but also attacking Lisbon and Cadiz.

In 845 they appeared before Hamburg with a fleet of 600 ships, and, after sacking that city, went on to Paris which they captured, though here they afterwards suffered a defeat due to the confusion caused by a timely fog. Then came further raids on Britain, and in 848 Bordeaux was sacked by them.

In 851 they came in 350 ships to Kent again, and Canterbury and London were looted and burnt; but shortly after this they were routed at Aclea, probably Oakley, near Basingstoke. At

this juncture, however, it will be best to pause in the midst of the terrible tale of their raids ; for in the year 849 Alfred the Great, their ultimate conqueror, was born, and the battle of Aclea, when he was a child of two years old, marks a turning-point in their fortunes.

The bald statement of their activities which I have given above will serve as sufficient introduction to the epic story of Alfred's life and victories ; and the reader will thus understand the extent of the menace he had to meet. The raids had now developed from their piratical and sporadic beginnings into a concerted attack on Christendom, and there was a real danger that paganism would triumph over it.

The loot which the invaders had carried off was immeasurable, the damage they had wrought incalculable. The terror they had inspired had knocked the heart out of the Christians on the Continent : panic reigned everywhere, and all men fled at sight of the black boats which had now developed into large fighting ships, each carrying 150 men trained to the last ounce as warriors and seamen.

Only the southern Anglo-Saxons, the heroic forefathers of the men of South England, stood firm against them ; and in my next chapter we shall see how these English, after many defeats, won that last battle of which the Continental proverb speaks, and saved the civilized world.

The Vikings, of course, have not left in Britain many remains of their incursions, but a certain number of objects have been found in their graves. In the museum at Edinburgh you will find some of

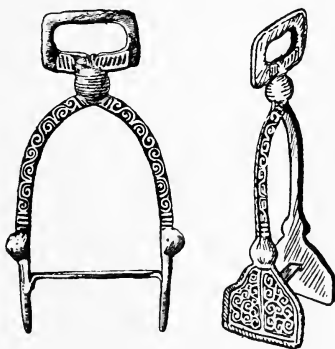
their weapons and personal ornaments, including a great horde of silver objects found at Skaill, in the Orkneys, where for many generations the raiders had their northern base ; and though these articles date from nearly a century later than the period with which we are now dealing, they are typical of the Viking arts and crafts. In this particular hoard there were several silver coins struck in Baghdad and Samarcand, which fact indicates that the plundering raids of these reckless Sea-rovers had extended very far. The massive silver bracelets and brooches are of good, if rather ponderous, workmanship, but they are inferior to articles made by the Anglo-Saxons.

From the grave of a Viking chief and his wife in Colonsay come a sword, part of a shield, a hammer, and a pair of blacksmith's tongs, these being found with the man, while with the woman were a bronze cooking-pan, some silver ornaments, and a string of glass beads. The skeleton of another Viking was discovered at Kiloran Bay, Colonsay, and with it were the bones of his horse, his sword and spear, some boat-rivets, bronze ornaments, and a pair of scales and set of weights for weighing the gold and silver he had looted.

In the British Museum there are many Viking remains, including an interesting group of objects found in a tomb on the Isle of Barra in the Hebrides. The tomb consisted of a mound of sand and a standing stone on top ; and the burial revealed the bones of an aged Viking together with a sword, a shield, two fine bronze brooches, an iron comb for preparing flax, a bone comb for the hair, and other articles.



Several richly ornamented stirrups of Viking horsemen are to be seen in the British Museum and in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, one of them having been found in the Thames at Battersea, and another at Magdalen Bridge, Oxford. But the most interesting Viking remains are preserved in their own country, and there at Christiania one of their ships, found at Gokstad, near that city, is exhibited. It is  $79\frac{1}{4}$  feet from stem to stern, and had 16 oars on each side, 20 feet long, which passed through rowlocks fitted with shutters to be used in bad weather. There was also a 40-foot mast which carried a large, square sail.



Inlaid Stirrup from the Thames at Battersea.

Parts of an awning were found, having red and white stripes; and on board there were an iron anchor, buckets, a cauldron for cooking, a kettle,

cups, plates, a bedstead, and a draughtsboard and draughtsmen.

This is a typical Viking vessel of the early Eighth Century, but in later times, as I have said, their ships were of much greater size. Traces of them have been found in Britain, and in the Torquay Museum, I may mention, there is part of one of them which was found at Newton Abbot.

## CHAPTER XXI

### ALFRED THE GREAT

*(Wantage and Ashdown in Berkshire ; Winchester in Hampshire ; Snareshill in Norfolk ; Athelney and Aller in Somerset, etc.).*

**I**N the following brief account of the life of Alfred the Great, I want to lay stress on the greatness of the danger by which our country was menaced in his reign. In the last chapter I told how, between 793 and 851, the terrible Vikings had sacked cities such as Utrecht, Antwerp, Hamburg and Bordeaux on the Continent, and London, Canterbury, Rochester, and many others in England ; how they had looted monasteries and churches far and wide, carrying off enormous spoil ; and how large areas in the north of the European continent, all Ireland, and a considerable part of Britain, had been utterly wasted by them.

At the time of Alfred's birth, 849, it seemed likely that Christianity and civilization would be stamped out in these lands by the pagan Danish Vikings ; and a state of panic prevailed on all sides, while in England conditions were not improved by the fact that Alfred's father, Aethelwulf, King of the West Saxons (Wessex), the most important monarch in the island, was a mild and pious personage who seems to have been much more anxious to keep himself in the good graces

of the Church than to use his sword against the invaders.

Alfred was born at Wantage in the Vale of the White Horse in Berkshire; but except for the so-called "Alfred's Well" in that town no trace is left there of his times, though a modern statue of him is now to be seen. He was Aethelwulf's youngest son, his mother being Queen Osburh, daughter of Oslac, a nobleman who was by descent a Jute from the Isle of Wight; but the boy was his father's favourite, and at the age of four was sent to Rome, where, as a compliment to his family, he was invested with the name and insignia of a Roman consul. In 855 Aethelwulf himself paid a visit to Rome, the six-year-old Alfred going with him; and there the King made magnificent presents to the ecclesiastical authorities, including gold and silver in money, a crown weighing four pounds of pure gold, two gold vases, a gold-mounted sword, two gold statues, and other valuable articles, all revealing the wealth of the Kingdom of Wessex. In fact, in spite of the Viking plunderers, he was so rich that in that same year he made over to the church in England one-tenth of his estates.

While still on the Continent Aethelwulf received news of the death of Queen Osburh, and shortly afterwards he married Princess Judith, the pretty little thirteen-year-old daughter of King Charles the Bald of France. He survived his return to England with his child-wife for only two years, and was succeeded by his eldest son Aethelbald, a scamp who, actually, had seized the throne during his father's absence abroad,

but had been forgiven by his mild and pious parent, and now added to his crimes by falling in love with the pretty Judith.

I may mention that Judith, a widow of fifteen years of age, at once married the new king, this son of her late husband, although it was against the law to do so; and when he died in disgrace less than three years later, she ran away to France, where her father clapped her into a



A Gold Necklace now in the British Museum.

nunnery. There, however, she secretly met and fell in love with Count Baldwin of Flanders, and eloped with him; and Matilda of Flanders who married William the Conqueror was a descendant of this union, so that our present King has the romantic little Judith as a remote ancestress.

Meanwhile, the Vikings had renewed their raids on Britain, and, sailing up the Bristol Channel, or the Estuary of the Dec, had devastated Shropshire, while at about the same time we find other bands of them plundering Spain and the Barbary coast. In 860 they sacked and burnt Winchester, though the parent-church of the present cathedral, which had just been fortified by Bishop Swithun, escaped; but while they were marching off with the plunder they were attacked and almost

annihilated by the men of Hampshire and Berkshire, who recovered the stolen goods.

I may mention in passing that this Bishop Swithun, who died in 862, is the St. Swithin on whose festival a fall of rain is supposed to foretell a period of 40 wet days. Swithun was interred at his own request outside his church, desiring in his humility that his bones should not have the shelter of the interior; and whenever it rained the water from the caves drenched his grave. Now it seems that by chance there were some noticeable periods of wet weather which happened to begin at about the date of Swithun's festival and lasted some 40 days; and thus people began to say at such times, perhaps, that the saint was subjecting his flesh to a posthumous mortification, the idea leading ultimately to the established belief that when it rained on the day of the festival the traditional 40 days of penance was about to begin.

Aethelbald was succeeded in turn by his two brothers, Aethelbert and Aethelred, and both had to fight against the Danish Vikings; but it was in 866, in the reign of the latter, that the most serious invasion of the country began. The Vikings had now formed themselves into what was known as the "Grand Army," a vast assembly of cavalry and infantry; and the brunt of the first attack was borne by Northumbria, whose two joint kings were killed while fighting the enemy in the streets of York. Thenceforth the north-east coasts of Britain were largely settled by these Danes, and their blood still runs in the veins of many an Englishman of those parts.

In 868 the Grand Army captured Nottingham but were afterwards themselves besieged there by King Aethelred's forces from Wessex, and having come to terms with him, marched back to York. At this time Alfred, who fought beside his brother, the King, at Nottingham, was 18 years of age, and had just married Ealhswith, daughter of Aethelred, surnamed the Mickle, Ealdorman of the Gainas, a people whose name survives in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. This Mercian lady, however, plays no part whatsoever in the drama of her time, and either was of too extraordinary a character to contribute anything elevating to the historians, or else was of too ordinary a disposition to contribute anything at all.

In 870 the Viking army marched southwards, burning Peterborough, Ely, and other places; but at Snareshill, near Thetford, in Norfolk, they were met by the East Anglians under their King Edmund, a vassal of Wessex, afterwards canonized as a saint and martyr. The invaders were victorious, and Edmund, having been captured, was tied to a tree and shot to death with arrows. On the heath near Snareshill you may see several mounds which are believed to be the graves of the men who fell in this battle; but Edmund's body was taken in the end to his palace of Bedricsworth, the name of which place was on that account changed to Bury (i.e. Burgh) St. Edmund's, where the famous abbey was afterwards erected over his tomb.

The Grand Army wintered at Thetford, and in the spring of 871 marched against Wessex, capturing on their way the city of Reading, an

important Anglo-Saxon centre, where many graves of the period have been found. A few days later the royal army of Wessex, under the King and his young brother Alfred, arrived on the scene, only, however, to suffer defeat; after which the invaders advanced south to the Berkshire Downs.



Openwork Jewel, set with Garnets, from Twickenham, Middlesex.

Here, at that part of the Downs known as Ashdown, Alfred led an attack on them; "charging up hill like a wild boar"; and when his forces had been joined by those of his brother, the Vikings fled back to Reading, leaving their King, five of his generals, and thousands of men, dead upon the Downs.

There is a sword in the British Museum which was found at Ashdown, and which is probably a relic of this battle. This great success, however, was followed by almost as great a defeat; for shortly afterwards the reinforced Viking army was victorious at Marden, near Bedwyn in Wiltshire, and King Aethelred was mortally wounded. He died a few days later and was buried at Wimborne in Dorset (where, however, there are now no remains of the period); and Alfred, then aged 22, was crowned in his stead; but within a month of his coronation he was badly defeated in a fierce engagement at Wilton in Wiltshire.

The Viking army spent the following winter in London, where their King Halfdene caused his coins to be struck, and some of these, bearing an



ancient Roman device, are to be seen in the British Museum. In 873 we find the Grand Army at Torksey in Lincolnshire, and in 874 at Repton. In 875 half the Army was garrisoned on the Tyne, while the other half was stationed at Cambridge; but in the following year they marched again against Alfred and his Kingdom of Wessex, and so great was their concentration on this objective that no raids elsewhere in Britain or on the Continent are recorded at this time. Alfred, in fact, had to meet the entire Viking power; and his ultimate victory over them can truly be said to have saved western Christendom.

The Grand Army got as far as Wareham in Dorset, but here they were besieged by Alfred. The Viking cavalry, however, burst out of the town and rode to Exeter, where again they were besieged; and meanwhile a storm wrecked the invaders' fleet as it was passing under the cliffs of Swanage, and 120 ships were sunk, all of the crews being drowned. A truce was called, and the Vikings retired to Gloucester; but in 878 they broke the pact and again marched into Wessex, seizing Chippenham in Wiltshire, and making it the base of a campaign which, by its swiftness and unexpectedness, threw the whole kingdom into panic.

Alfred and his chief nobles fled to Athelney in Somerset, then an island in the marshes of the Parret, and there amongst the reeds and osiers they lived for some months, in memory of which a monastery was afterwards erected on the spot by the King, but no traces of it now remain. It was here in Athelney that the well-known incident of

the burnt cakes took place; but it is not now thought that the King was ever actually a friendless refugee, as the story relates, he having been resident here with his court and his army.

The famous jewel, like a locket, inscribed with his name, which is now to be seen in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, seems to have been lost by him at this place; for it was found here in 1693. It is made of gold and enamel, and bears the words: *Aelfred mec heht gewyrcan*, "Alfred had me worked." There is a facsimile of it to be seen in the British Museum.

The tide of the Vikings' success in this campaign turned when a considerable body of them was nearly annihilated in Devonshire. Encouraged by this victory Alfred left Athelney, joined his troops by arrangement at Penselwood in Somerset, and marched by way of Iley, near Warminster in Wiltshire, to a place called Ethandum, probably Eddington, whither the Viking Grand Army had advanced from Chippenham to meet him.

The battle was a complete victory for Alfred, and the remnant of the Danes, under their King Guthrum, fled back to their base, leaving hecatombs of dead behind them. A few days later Guthrum surrendered on terms which included a promise to leave Wessex, and to accept the Christian faith.

Three weeks later the Viking monarch and 29 of his generals came humbly to the little Somersetshire village of Aller, near Athelney, and were baptised. The magnanimous Alfred, in whom we can already recognise the typical English gentleman, then entertained the fallen Vikings sumptuously



Sword-hilt from Wallingford-on-Thames.



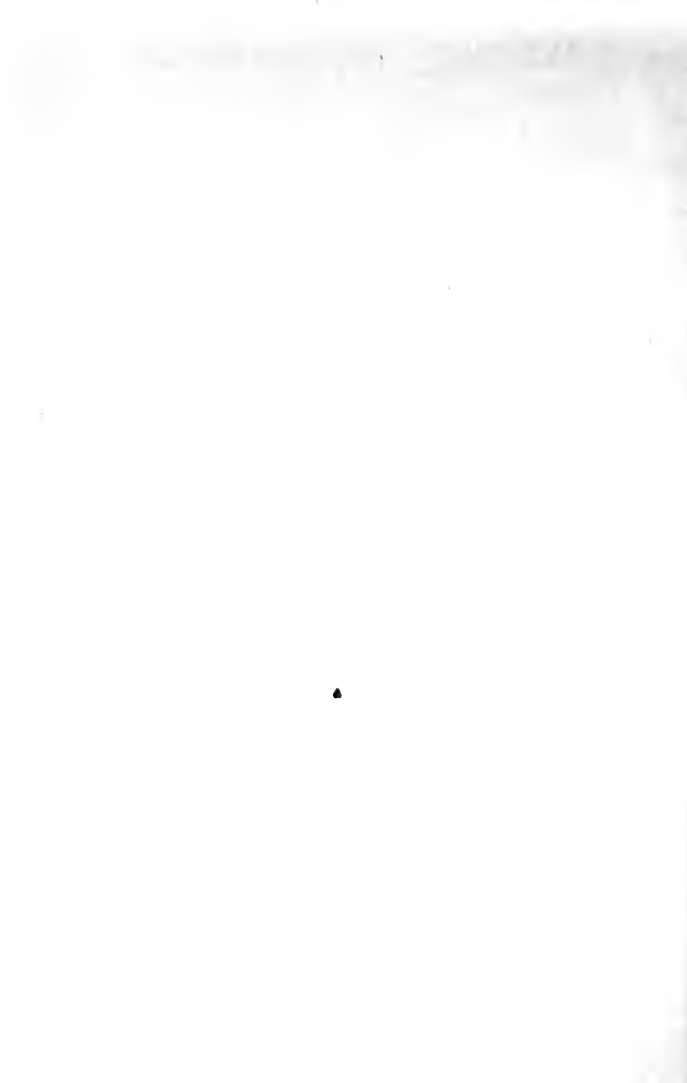
Alfred's Jewel (front).

(p. 192)



Alfred's Jewel (back).

(p. 192)



for some three weeks, after which they were permitted to return to Chippenham, whence they marched their men to Cirencester, and so back to East Anglia.

Guthrum behaved equally honourably, for in the following year another host of Vikings landed at the mouth of the Thames, and established themselves at Fulham, now part of London; but Guthrum at once got into touch with them, told them, apparently, that the English were unconquerable, and persuaded them to depart, whereupon they went off to Ghent, and during the next thirteen years harried Flanders, burnt Aachen and other cities, and were only prevented from sacking Paris by the payment of a great sum of money.

It will be remembered that in 870 the Vikings had murdered Edmund, the East Anglian King, whose body was afterwards buried at Bury St. Edmund's; and now, only ten years or so later, we find the converted Guthrum amongst the pilgrims at his tomb, and in the British Museum you may see coins struck by him in honour of this royal English martyr.

In the next chapter I will tell of Alfred's later years, of his renewed wars with, and victory over, the Vikings, and of the many works he carried out; but to understand the story of the times aright it must be realized that the east coast of England was now almost entirely in the hands of the invaders, and though Alfred's Kingdom of Wessex was free of them, they held York, Nottingham, Leicester, Derby, Lincoln, Stamford, and other inland centres in the Midlands and North.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE CLOSE OF ALFRED'S REIGN

*(Shaftesbury in Dorset ; Winchester in Hampshire ;  
Benfleet in Essex ; Gloucester, etc.).*

**I**N the last chapter I related how King Alfred of Wessex got the better of the Danish Vikings in 878 ; how Guthrum, one of their kings, became a Christian and retired peaceably to East Anglia ; and how the " Grand Army " turned its attention to the Continent, leaving Alfred unmolested in Wessex for many years, though large areas of eastern, northern and middle England were now in Viking hands.

Meanwhile the great Wessex ruler, realizing that the power of the Vikings depended on their command of the seas, built a large fleet, including battleships of sixty oars and more, twice the length of the usual vessel of the period ; and at the same time he organized the army, fortified the cities, regulated the laws of the country, and introduced a scheme of education of the most far-reaching character, which brought back to England the glories of the Golden Age of learning after a period of almost complete extinction.

Alfred's biographer, Asser, afterwards Bishop of Sherborne, who was a Briton from Wales, has left us a fairly full account of the great King's life and works, an English translation of which is

now accessible in print ; while the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, begun in his reign and also now to be obtained in English, supplies other details. Thus the interested reader of the present day can easily make himself acquainted with the facts and, with the help of such standard works as Sir Charles Oman's *England before the Norman Conquest*, can, if he will, bring the events of this important period clearly before his mind.

Alfred is generally recognized as having been a man of the highest possible character, honourable, dauntless, tolerant to a fault, hard-working, the father of his people, a wise king, a keen scholar, a mighty hunter and sportsman, a gallant fighter, recklessly brave, cheery in adversity, modest in the days of his glory, and deeply religious in an unostentatious way. He was, however, a sick man ; and his biographer tells us that he was always either in pain, or else in a state of anxiety and dread in regard to his next attack. What his ailment was nobody knows, but it has been suggested that it was some form of intermittent neuritis. In spite of this physical infirmity, however, he was extraordinarily energetic, and his short life was filled to overflowing, his influence being felt in all directions, and the memory of his many activities surviving in men's minds for centuries to come.

At Shaftesbury Alfred founded the abbey of St. Mary the Virgin in 880, and made his daughter Aethelgifu (Ethelgiva) its first abbess ; and William of Malmesbury, writing in the Twelfth Century, tells us that in his time a foundation inscription of that reign existed there. This abbey afterwards

became so rich that people used to say : “ If the Abbess of Shaftesbury might wed the Abbot of Glastonbury ”—another wealthy religious house—“ their heir would have more land than the King of England.” The abbey was razed to the ground at the Reformation, but modern excavations have revealed the foundations.

At Winchester Alfred founded the abbey of St. Mary, and also a minster on the north side of the Cathedral there, both of which survived until the Reformation. He also restored the minster which stood where the present Cathedral now rises ; and, to give an idea of the civilization of the Anglo-Saxon age, I may mention that no more than a century after his time there was an organ in the minster which possessed 400 bronze pipes and 26 sets of bellows.

In connection with the King’s many religious works it is interesting to notice that in 883 he sent two envoys, with a large sum of money for charitable purposes, to Rome and to India ; and William of Malmesbury states that some jewels brought back from India by these men were still to be seen at Sherborne in his time. This, I suppose, is the earliest known occasion on which Englishmen set foot in India ; and it gives us a connection with that country of over a thousand years. The King also corresponded with the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who asked him to contribute to a fund for the ransom of some Christian bishops and monks who had been captured by the Moslems.

Asser tells us that Alfred “ constructed in wonderful style royal halls and chambers of stone



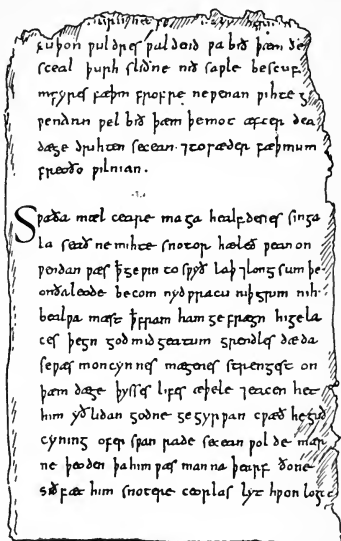
and wood, and ancient kingly residences of stone were moved by his orders from their former positions, and sumptuously rebuilt in more suitable places." Reference is perhaps made here to some of the old Roman ruins, the masonry of which was thus reused ; for there are several existing churches in England of Anglo-Saxon date, clearly built of Roman stone, and it may be that a closer examination of some of our ruined castles would reveal similar work.

Asser also tells us that he established great schools where Latin and English literature was taught ; and he says "it was a strange sight to see even the old noblemen, who had been illiterate from infancy, learning how to read, preferring this unaccustomed and laborious discipline to losing the exercise of their power." The King himself translated many books into English, and he made a great collection of early English poetry, which is now lost, but may yet one day be found.

In 892, after nearly 15 years of peace, our country was again attacked by the main body of the Vikings, who are to be distinguished now from those who had settled north of Wessex after the first campaigns ; and once more Alfred had to take the field. For the invasion the Vikings had collected a fleet of 250 ships at Boulogne, on which the Grand Army was embarked with its horses and material ; and at the same time another army in a fleet of eighty ships, under a leader named Hasting or Haesten, prepared to work with them.

The Grand Army landed at Lympne on the coast of Kent, near Folkestone, and Hasting's force passed up the Thames Estuary to Milton, some

nine miles east of Chatham; but after some months of sporadic warfare the Danes who had settled on the east coast after their last defeats joined with their kinsmen, and a concerted attack was made on Alfred's dominions.



Part of the Anglo-Saxon Poem "Beowulf."

The southern English met them and routed them at Farnham, Surrey; but meanwhile some of the enemy ships had coasted round to Devon to get at Wessex from the other side, and had laid

siege to Exeter. Alfred, however, marched to its relief and again was victorious, the enemy retreating apparently, to the coast of North Devon. Meanwhile Hasting had transferred his base to Benfleet in Essex, a little town now famous for its oysters, six miles west of Southend; but here they were attacked by another English force, the camp was captured, a vast mass of plunder was taken, Hasting's wife and two sons were made prisoners and the ships of the fleet were either broken up, burnt, or brought up the Thames to London.

When the railway line through Benfleet was being constructed the remains of many of these burnt Viking ships were found; and some earthworks which are thought to have formed a corner of Hasting's stronghold can still be seen near the churchyard.

Hasting himself was away on a raid inland at the time of this disaster, and he now joined up with the Danes who were living in East Anglia, the Midlands of Mercia, and Northumbria, and marched right across England, north of Alfred's Kingdom, to the Severn, intending to effect a junction with the force which had been driven from Exeter, and was apparently moving northwards along the coast. But the English, who now had the British of Wales as allies, surrounded him at Buttington, perhaps the village of that name near Shrewsbury, and though Hasting escaped with part of his force back to Essex, the main body was annihilated.

Some time later, however, the Viking leader made a sudden raid across the Midlands to Chester, which was then a deserted city, but, after being

besieged here, he and his army retired north-eastwards into Northumbria, and so marched southwards back to East Anglia.

In 895 the Vikings, with a large number of their lighter vessels, pushed up the river Lea into Hertfordshire, and formed a camp at or near Ware; but Alfred by an ingenious piece of engineering, diverted the course of the river and left the enemy's ships high and dry, with the result that when the Vikings were driven out of their stronghold the entire fleet was captured.

A few months later the troops of the Grand Army broke up, some flying into East Anglia and the country further north, where they were absorbed into a population already largely Danish; and others escaping to their remaining ships and going back to the Continent, where defeats were rare and plunder easy. "Thanks be to God," says the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "the Grand Army had not," as it had intended, "utterly broken down the English nation." Alfred behaved with the utmost magnanimity to the routed Vikings: he restored Hasting's wife and sons to him, and apparently allowed him to leave the country unmolested; and he took no steps to eject the other Danes from those parts where they had settled, and who now recognized his supremacy.

Thus the terrible Viking menace was dissipated, and for the four remaining years of Alfred's life there was peace in the land, the remnant of the settled Danes living on good terms with the English as though some strange spell of the land itself had tamed them and transformed them into law-abiding citizens.

The great King died on October 26, 900, at the early age of 52, and was buried at Winchester. There his body lay for over 200 years in the minster founded by him ; but in 1110 it was removed to the abbey of Hyde on the north side of the city, just beyond the walls.

At the Reformation this abbey was destroyed and Alfred's bones are supposed to have been removed to the Cathedral, where to this day you may see a stone casket of the time of Henry the Eighth on which there is an inscription stating that it contains them. But it may be that they were scattered ; for the Reformers, with a sound British objection to superstition which is some excuse for their vandalism, openly said that they intended "to sweep away all the rotten bones that be called relics." The matter is further complicated by the fact that in the reign of George the Third, the ruins of the abbey of Hyde left by Henry the Eighth's men were cleared away, the county jail being built upon the spot, and in the course of this work a great sarcophagus, believed by some to be Alfred's, was discovered. It was broken up, however, and its contents were tipped on to the dust-heap.

Moreover, even if the bones were removed to the Cathedral it is doubtful whether they are certainly contained in the casket supposed to hold them ; for in the Civil War the Puritan troops wrecked the place, routing out the bones of ancient Kings, and using them as missiles with which to break the stained-glass windows.

I may state in passing that there are six caskets preserved in Winchester Cathedral, purporting to contain the remains of sovereigns of the Anglo-

Saxon period, including several early kings of Wessex and their successors the Kings of all England : you may see them resting on top of the great screen in front of the choir.

Alfred left several children, amongst whom I must find room to mention Princess Aethelflaed, who married a great Mercian nobleman, and is generally spoken of as "Lady of the Mercians." She was a woman of outstanding character. In 907 she rebuilt and repopled the city of Chester, which, in its present form, thus owes its foundation to her ; and in the succeeding years she fortified a number of places, including Cherbury on the Welsh frontier, Runcorn at the mouth of the Mersey, Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth in Shropshire, Eddisbury in Cheshire, and many others.

At Gloucester she founded the minster of St. Oswald, and conveyed thither the body of that sainted King of Northumbria ; and when she died she was herself buried here. Only a few fragments are left of the building : you may see them in what was once St. Catherine's churchyard, but is now a railed-off area amongst the streets at the back of Gloucester Cathedral.

A younger daughter of Alfred named Aelfthryth married Baldwin, Count of Flanders, (whose mother was that Judith mentioned in the previous chapter) and, dying in 929 was buried beside him in the church of St. Peter in Ghent. Her descendant, Matilda of Flanders, married William the Conqueror, thus bringing back to the royal house of England the blood of this most famous Anglo-Saxon King, the noblest sovereign who has ever worn the British Crown.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE FIRST KINGS OF ALL ENGLAND

*(Dacre in Cumberland ; Burnley in Lancashire ; Milton Abbey in Dorset ; Malmesbury in Wiltshire, etc.).*

ON the death of Alfred the Great in 900, of which I wrote in the last chapter, the throne passed to his son Edward, generally called Edward the Elder, who ought really to be spoken of as Edward the First, though that designation has now been so long applied to his descendant, the Plantagenet Edward who came to the throne in 1272, that the mistake cannot now be rectified. There were three English Kings of England of the name of Edward before the Norman Conquest ; and had not the Anglo-Saxon period been so unfortunately ignored by historians, our late King Edward the Seventh would have been known to us by the more correct designation, Edward the Tenth.

This Edward the Elder in 910 was at war with the Danish settlers who had rebelled against him, but he defeated them at Wednesfield (i.e. Woden's Field), near Wolverhampton in Staffordshire, now a small industrial town of no antiquarian interest, and most of their chief men, including three so-called " kings," were left dead upon the field. In 913 a great Viking fleet joined the disaffected settlers, but again they suffered defeat, and we

hear of no further attack from the Continent for the ensuing sixty years or so.

During the next ten years we see the gradual submission of all the Danes living in England, and their conversion into law-abiding residents. The chief centres where they congregated—York, Derby, Northampton, Leicester, Stamford, Lincoln, Nottingham, Colchester, Cambridge, and elsewhere—surrendered; and the Danish leaders all accepted Edward as their overlord. The Britons of Wales, too, acknowledged his sovereignty, as also did Constantine, King of the Scots and Picts.

Thus in the year of Edward's death, 924, all England was in his hands, and he has the proud distinction of being the first real King of a united country, although Wessex had claimed a nominal overlordship of the whole island ever since the time of Egbert, a century before. In spite of this important fact, however, very little is known about him, and he can hardly be said to stand out as a personality. We read that he was an educated man, fond of books, and finding great pleasure in Anglo-Saxon poetry; and his excellently minted coins are very noticeable. He married three times, and was the father of fourteen children, being succeeded by his eldest son Aethelstan, who was crowned at Kingston-on-Thames. This prince had early come under the notice of his grandfather, Alfred, who had made him a knight while he was still a child, and had given him a scarlet cloak, a girdle studded with jewels, and a small sword in a golden scabbard.

Shortly after his coronation Aethelstan went to





Tamworth in Staffordshire, and there received the homage of Sihtric "Caoch," the Danish sub-King of York; and although this personage was advanced in years, and, as his name "Caoch" implies, had only one eye, Aethelstan gave one of his sisters in marriage to him. The unfortunate lady's sacrifice to national politics, however, was not of long duration; for Sihtric died just over a year later, whereupon Aethelstan marched north and suppressed the little vassal kingdom.



Sword Handle with Gold Filigree and Garnets, from Cumberland.

Aethelstan then proceeded to Dacre, near Ullswater in Cumberland, and there received the homage of Eugenius, or Owain, the British King of Strathclyde (a realm then restricted more or less to Cumberland), and Constantine, King of the Scots and Picts, while several British princes from Wales, and other semi-independent rulers made their vows of allegiance.

The ancient castle at Dacre, long used as a farmhouse, dates in part from this age, and there is a room in it still called "the room of the three Kings" in memory of this meeting. Scotland and Strathclyde had suffered very severely from the Viking raids, and there were powerful Scandinavian settlements in the Orkneys, Caithness, Sutherland, the Hebrides, the western coasts of the mainland,

Argyle, and the west of Cumberland and Westmorland; and the two northern Kings must have been ready enough to place themselves under Aethelstan's protection.

In the year 933, however, Constantine renounced his allegiance, and joined forces with the Danes, whereupon Aethelstan and his English army marched north as far as Aberdeen, while his fleet wrought destruction on the Scottish shores as far north as Caithness.

In 937 Constantine again joined with the Vikings and this time also with Eugenius of Strathclyde and the Danes from Dublin in Ireland, under the leadership of the outlaw Anlaf, a son of the one-eyed old Sihtric, who was trying to regain his father's Kingdom of York; but Aethelstan, with his brother Prince Edmund (afterwards King), inflicted so tremendous a defeat upon the allies at a place called Brunanburh that for generations the battle was remembered with awe. Constantine's son, five "kings," seven earls, and probably Eugenius of Strathclyde himself, were slain; and Anlaf was forced to fly back to Ireland.

Many sites have been suggested for this memorable battle, but that proposed by Mr. J. T. Marquis\* seems to be the most probable, namely Burnley in Lancashire, the actual battleground being on the east of the river Brun, in the fields overlooked by the high ground of Brunshaw, which seems to be the Brunan-burh itself.

Before the battle Aethelstan had visited Beverley Minster in Yorkshire and had placed on the altar

\* Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian society, vol. xxvi.

the sword which had been given to him as a child by Alfred the Great, promising to redeem it if he were victorious; and after his great triumph he bequeathed it to the Minster, and it now lies in the tomb of St. John of Beverley there. In 929 he had founded Milton Abbey in Dorset; and now, after the victory, he built the chapel of St. Catharine nearby, which is still to be seen in the abbey woods, though it was largely rebuilt in Norman times.



Sword-hilt from  
Chessel Down,  
Isle of Wight.

It may be of interest if I give here a translation of parts of the great song of victory composed after this battle, and inserted in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

“Here Aethelstan, King, of earls the lord, rewarder of heroes, and his brother Edmund, prince, elder of ancient race, slew in the fight with the edge of their swords the foe at Brunanburh. The(se two) sons of Edward (the Elder) their shield-walls clove, and hewed down their banners with the vengeance of their axes . . . Midst the din of the field the warrior sweated, since the sun was up at morning-tide—gigantic light, glad over earth, the bright candle of God, Eternal Lord—till the noble creature set in the western main . . . With chosen troops throughout the day the fierce West Saxons pressed on the hated forces, hewed down the fugitives, and scattered the rear with strong mill-sharpened blades. The Mercians, too, spared not the hard hand-play to any of those who with Anlaf

over the briny deep in the ship's bosom sought this land for the hardy fight. Five Kings lay on the field of battle in the bloom of youth, pierced with swords. So seven also of the earls of Anlaf, and of the ship's crew(s) unnumbered crowds. There was dispersed the little band of hardy Scots, the dread of northern hordes, urged to the noisy deep by unrelenting fate, the King of the fleet with his slender craft escaping (only) with his life on the felon flood. And so, too, Constantine, the valiant chief, returned to the north in hasty flight. . . . His son he left on the field of battle, mangled with wounds: young at the fight the fair-haired youth had no reason to boast of the slaughtering strife. No more could old Inwood and Anlaf with the wrecks of their army laugh and say that they on the field of stern command had been the better workmen in the conflict of banners, the clash of spears, the meeting of heroes, and the clattering of weapons, which they on the field of slaughter played with the sons of Edward. The northmen sailed (away) in their nailed ships, a dreary remnant on the roaring sea: over deep water Dublin they sought, and the shores of Ireland, in great disgrace. Thus, then, the brothers both together, the King and the Prince, sought their country, the land of Wessex (having been) triumphant in the fight . . . Before this same (battle) no greater slaughter yet was made ever in this island, of people slain with the edge of the sword (so far) as the books of the old historians inform us, since hither came from the eastern shores the Angles and the Saxons over the broad sea and sought Britain—the fierce battle-smiths (who) overcame the

Welsh, most valiant earls, and gained the land."

Aethelstan was regarded in Europe as one of the most important sovereigns of the age, and an Irish chronicler speaks of him as "the main beam of the honour of the western world." He had several sisters whom he married to the various crowned heads of the time, thus becoming brother-in-law to Charles the Simple of France, Otto the Great of Germany, Louis of Provence, Louis of Aquitaine, Hugh the Great of Paris, and an unnamed Prince of the Alps.



Silver Sword Handle  
(restored) from Fetter  
Lane, London.

Many great Continental princes lived at the English court, these including Louis d'Outremer, Alan of Brittany, Hacco of Norway, and others; and for the first time England seems to take her place as what would now be called a first-class Power.

Aethelstan's reign ended in a blaze of glory. He died at Gloucester in 939, and his body was taken to the abbey of Malmesbury in Wiltshire. Malmesbury, which in early Anglo-Saxon days was known as Ingelburne, already possessed a monastery built in the Seventh Century by an Irish missionary called Maeldulbh or Maidulph, after whom the place was now beginning to be known as Maidulfesburgh, a name which passed into Maldelmsburgh and thence into Malmesbury; but Aethelstan reconstructed these monastic buildings, and endowed the new abbey with great

estates. I should remind the reader here that one of the most famous sons of Malmesbury was that Aldhelm of whom I wrote in Chapter XVIII.

Aethelstan was buried in this abbey in front of the altar of St. Mary, and though the building as we have it now dates from the Twelfth Century and other later periods, the royal tomb is still to be seen.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE LIFE OF DUNSTAN

*(Glastonbury and Frome in Somerset ; Kingston-on-Thames in Surrey ; Corfe and Wareham in Dorset ; Calne in Wiltshire, etc.).*

**I**N the year 921, three years before the death of Edward the Elder, there was born at Glastonbury in Somerset a child who ultimately became the greatest and strangest figure of his age, and who, after his death, was canonized as a saint : namely, Dunstan, son of a wealthy Wessex nobleman whose relatives held high office at court and in the Church.

Glastonbury, or the Isle of Avalon as it was formerly named, was in those days already a great religious centre, and was believed to be, as King Henry the Second later called it, " the source and origin of all religion in England." Christian missionaries are said to have settled here in the early years of the Roman occupation, and a tradition, for which there is no very early authority, states that Joseph of Arimathea had come here with these missionaries, and had built a little church made of wattle.\*

In the Sixth Century King Arthur and Queen Guinivere were buried in this church or its successor ; and in the year 708 King Ine of Wessex caused a more substantial building to be erected on the site, to which were attached the dwellings of the monks. By the time of Alfred the monastery

\* *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 230 ff.



had become rich and famous, and that king made many presents to it, including a supposed fragment of the true cross which had been given to him by Pope Marinus.

The great abbey which still exists in ruins was not built till the Twelfth Century ; and at the time of the birth of Dunstan we are to think of the place as consisting of a cluster of stone and wooden houses grouped around King Ine's church, set amidst the rich orchards of Avalon on rising ground beside the river Brue which, flowing down to the Bristol Channel, spread its waters through marshlands and navigable streams on all sides.

Dunstan's youth was spent during the glorious reign of Aethelstan (924-940), victor over Danish Vikings and Scots, and acknowledged King of all Britain. From an early age he believed that he was destined for the church, like his father's two brothers who were both bishops ; and once when he had fallen asleep in the sacred precincts at Glastonbury he dreamt that a celestial spirit came to him and told him that one day he would be the means of enriching and enlarging the monastery—a vision which played an important part in the shaping of his career.

He was a handsome, fair-complexioned boy, with what is described as somewhat thin but beautiful hair ; and though in temperament he was artistic and perhaps a little effeminate, his quick wit, fluency of speech, and light-hearted nature, made him a great favourite with women. His fellow students at school, however, regarded him with disfavour, partly because he worked so hard and so successfully at his lessons, and partly because

he had ecstatic moments of intense piety, which English boys of all periods heartily resent.

Moreover, he was a born poet and musician, and was in the habit of singing old English folk-songs, grave and gay, and accompanying himself upon a small harp which he often carried about with him. Some of these ancient songs were of a mystic, pagan character; and at length his companions complained to the King, their patron, about him, declaring that the songs were like the chants of sorcerers, the result being that he was expelled.



Design on Gravestone, Bibury, Glos.

At this time he was growing to manhood, and had fallen passionately in love with a certain girl whom he wanted to marry, which would have meant the abandoning of his ecclesiastical career; but his uncle, the Bishop of Winchester, was endeavouring to persuade him to give her up and thus the boy was thoroughly distracted when this blow of his expulsion

fell upon him. Then one day when he was riding his horse along a lonely road, his former companions pounced out upon him, threw him out of the saddle, and pushed him into a muddy pond.

A serious illness ensued, the lady of his heart

apparently jilted him, and, when at last he rose from his bed, he went to the Glastonbury monastery, and took the vows of a monk. But the fever of his love was still upon him, and in order to curb it he built himself a cell no more than five feet high and two and a half feet broad, wherein he could neither stand nor lie, and there for days together he fought his battle with the flesh.

Dreadful dreams came to him, and his fevered mind beheld all manner of devils who approached him in the form of bears, foxes, and dogs, fawned upon him, and whispered evil thoughts in his ear. He was troubled, too, by psychic phenomena: things hurtled through the air, so he said, and stones were flung at him by unseen hands, one of which was kept in the monastery in after years as a relic and souvenir of the saint's temptation.

When King Aethelstan died in 940 the throne passed to his brother Edmund; and in 943 this monarch, who had been much impressed by the young Dunstan's almost fantastic piety, made him Abbot of Glastonbury although he was only 22 years of age.

Edmund, however, was stabbed to death in a brawl at Pucklechurch in 946, and Dunstan sadly buried his patron at Glastonbury; after which a younger brother, Eadred, was crowned king, who bestowed on the youthful abbot his warmest friendship. This Eadred used the abbey of Glastonbury as a sort of safe-deposit for his valuables, and whenever the court was travelling about the country, all the King's private papers, jewellery, plate, and so forth were placed in Dunstan's care.

Eadred, however, fell ill in 955 at Frome (where to-day you may see two carved stones of the Saxon age built into the interior of the tower of the church); and, realizing that he was dying, he sent post-haste to Dunstan to bring the royal valuables so that he might distribute them fittingly. The abbot, however, did not reach him in time, and the long train of baggage-waggon was still on the highroad somewhere near Shepton Mallet when the news of the king's death was received, whereat, so a quaint old tale relates, Dunstan's horse was so shocked that it dropped dead beneath him.

Eadred was succeeded by yet another brother, Eadwig, a boy of 15, who, in the following year, 956, was crowned at Kingston-on-Thames; but an unfortunate incident marred the coronation festivities. There was an attractive widow at court, a royal lady of the name of Aethelgifu, whose daughter was a pretty girl of about the new king's own age; and the precocious Eadwig was devoted to these two, often flirting with the mother and showing an inclination to marry the daughter.

At the coronation feast, he was bored with the ceremonies, and slipped away, joining these ladies at their house; but presently the assembled nobles, extremely insulted, asked Dunstan to go and fetch him back. This the abbot did, and found the king sitting alone with Aethelgifu and her daughter, while the crown of England lay on the floor in the corner. There was a stormy scene, at the end of which Dunstan picked up the crown, banged it onto the boy's head, and dragged him back to the feast.

Eadwig never forgave him. He married Aethelgifu's daughter, fell entirely into the hands of his mother-in-law, and banished Dunstan, who fled to Flanders.

To-day in the market-place of Kingston you may see the stone traditionally believed to be that used at the coronations of Anglo-Saxon Kings, now surrounded by iron rails and ornamental pillars. At least six kings besides Eadwig were crowned here at Kingston, but there are few traces of the church in which the ceremonies took place, though the foundations were recently found just to the south of the present church.

In the following year, 957, the clerical party in the midlands crowned Eadgar, son of the late King Edmund, as their sovereign, declared Eadwig's marriage annulled on some pretext or other, drove the young queen and her mother from court, and, recalling Dunstan, offered him the bishopric of Worcester. At first he wished to decline the offer on the grounds of his unworthiness, but one night so he declared, he dreamed that the three apostles, Peter, Paul and Andrew, came to him to persuade him, and that Andrew gave him a smack with his stick, exclaiming angrily "Take that for your refusal!"—after which of course he was obliged, he said, to accept the honour.

Eadwig survived as what was called "half-king" for less than three more years, and died at the age of 19 in 959, whereupon Eadgar made Dunstan Bishop of London, and, in the following year, Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Primate's character was extraordinary. When the wild artistic mood was not upon him, he

was a stern disciplinarian, and was ruthless in routing out ill-living monks from their monasteries, and in imposing the strictest rules of life upon the clergy. Yet at other times he was the mildest and most tender-hearted of men, and it is said that he was very easily moved to tears. He was a great patriot, and insisted that the clergy should teach the Creed and the Lord's Prayer in English, not in Latin; and in other ways he maintained a certain English independence. A powerful nobleman contracted a marriage which was uncanonical: Dunstan angrily excommunicated him. The astonished man sent his agent to Rome, who returned with a letter from the Pope, advising the reconsideration of the case; but Dunstan refused to accept this ruling, declaring that he obeyed the dictates of God, not those of the Pope.



Silver-Gilt Cup from Halton Moor,  
Lancs.

High-handed actions of this kind obtained him many bitter enemies, but he fought his way through, so successfully influencing state-policy and so greatly raising the prestige of his sovereign that, madman though he must have some-

times seemed to be in the eyes of his opponents, he is spoken of as "the mainstay of the safety and glory of the English." There were times when he was very unpopular, and once during a procession

at Glastonbury somebody threw a stone at him which knocked his hat off; but, luckily for the thrower, Dunstan thought that the stone had been flung by the unseen hands of Satan, and he gave little attention to the incident.

He worked so hard that there certainly were times when he was nearly off his head, seeing delirious visions, and having many more encounters with the Devil himself, in one of which he said that he had tweaked the Satanic nose with a pair of tongs. At other times he was more artist than statesman or mystical cleric. Some of his drawings are still preserved in a book now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford; and we read that he made the designs for the church embroidery, and even that great ladies sent for him to design their dresses.

He was a skilled worker in metal, some beautiful objects of his making being afterwards kept at Glastonbury as relics; and he was an expert bookbinder. Moreover, he sang with passion the wild old songs of the English, and the funeral chants of forgotten kings, and often would sit playing on his harp for hours together, while his clergy listened in awe.

King Eadgar with Dunstan's help, raised the prestige of the English throne to even greater heights than it had attained under Aethelstan; and in 973 he had the satisfaction of being rowed in a state barge on the Dee at Chester by eight vassal sovereigns of British, Scandinavian and Scotch nationality, this royal crew including Kings of Wales, the Isle of Man, Strathclyde and Scotland. Eadgar died in 975, and Dunstan buried him at Glastonbury, afterwards crowning his 13-year-old

son Edward, later known as Edward the Martyr, though he ought really to be called Edward the Second. Eadgar had married twice, and this Edward was the child of his first marriage; but the second wife, Aelfrith, who was still living, also had a son, Aethelred, and of course she schemed and plotted to place her own child on the throne.

Then in 978, when the young King was but 16 years of age, he was stabbed by one of his step-mother's men at the gates of her house at Corfe in Dorset, where now stands Corfe Castle. He had been hunting on horseback in the neighbourhood, and, having lost touch with his attendants, had called at Aelfrith's house to enquire whether they had been seen. He had not dismounted from his horse, but had asked for something to drink; and it was while he was drinking that the blow was struck.

The terrified boy galloped away on his horse, but soon fell fainting from the saddle; and, his foot catching in the stirrup, he was dragged over the rough ground until he was battered to death. His body was afterwards carried to Wareham where it was buried in a marble coffin which is still to be seen there in St. Edward's Chapel; but later his remains were transferred to the famous abbey at Shaftesbury.

Dunstan then had no choice but to crown the young Aethelred, who proved to be England's most stupid King, nicknamed the "Redeless," which means the "ill-advised." I shall speak of his reign in the next chapter.

In that same year Dunstan had a narrow escape from death. An important conference was being



held in the upper room of a house at Calne, in Wiltshire, at which the Primate was urging the British clergy of the West to adopt the Roman rule of celibacy, and the proceedings had become heated when suddenly the floor gave way. Dunstan clutched at a joist which did not collapse, and, as though by a miracle, he remained unharmed; but the others were precipitated onto the ground below, some being killed and some injured.

The Archbishop was now but 57 years old, and his life was still marked by extraordinary austerities bringing in their train wild visions and ecstatic dreams. Now he was deep in affairs of state; now he was lost in his music, his arts, or his wide studies; and now he was cleric and saint again storming at the vanities and lusts of the flesh. But during his later years his days must have been clouded by the dangers which beset his beloved country. In 980 the Vikings once more attacked the English shores, descending on Thanet, Southampton, and Chester. In the next years they raided the coasts of Devon and Cornwall, and South Wales; and in 988 they devastated the lands of North Devon and Somerset.

It was during this latter visitation that Dunstan, still at the height of his powers, and preaching impassioned sermons said to have been the best he ever delivered, suddenly died at the age of 67, and was buried at Canterbury; but in 1012 the monks dug up some bones which they believed to be his and carried them back to Glastonbury, but it appears that the remains were not really those of the saint.

The monastery of Glastonbury possessed at this time a most extraordinary collection of relics. King Aethelstan had presented the remains of two English saints and those of a Pope ; and King Edmund had given relics of Aidan of Lindisfarne, the venerable Bede, Biscop, and the Abbess Hilda of Whitby, as also the arm and shoulder of St. Oswald, the King of Northumbria whose hand was preserved at Bamburgh and whose head was first at Lindisfarne and afterwards at Durham, where it still rests, as I related in a previous chapter.

Other benefactors had presented relics which purported to be a piece of Isaiah's tomb, a fragment of the floor of the temple of Jerusalem, a bit of the column at which Christ was scourged, some pieces of the sponges used at the crucifixion, some hairs from our Lord's head, a thorn from the crown of thorns, a thread from the Virgin Mary's dress, two bones of St. John the Baptist, and various relics of the apostles and saints.

The supposed bones of Dunstan were now added to this odd collection, and many were the miracles or " faith-cures " wrought by them, spurious though they were. Unfortunately no traces of the buildings carried out by this extraordinary man at Glastonbury have come down to us ; but the visitor to the ruins of the later abbey there may know at least that he stands where the astonishing Dunstan so often stood during the reigns of those eight kings under whose sovereignty his strange life was passed.

## CHAPTER XXV

### MORE SURVIVING CHURCHES

*(Leicester ; Pitlington in Durham ; Repton in Derbyshire ;  
Heysham in Lancashire ; Cambridge ; Oxford ; Kirk  
Hammerton in Yorkshire ; Hurley in Berkshire ;  
Brixworth in Northamptonshire, etc.).*

**I**N a previous chapter I described several churches of Anglo-Saxon date still surviving in various parts of the country ; and in the present chapter I will give a brief account of some others of this period which are worth a visit. Of course there are hundreds of churches in which traces of Anglo-Saxon work are to be seen ; but I will only mention here those which can show large parts of the original structure still intact.

I may speak in the first place of the church of St. Nicholas at Leicester, which appears to date from the Seventh Century, and which stands close beside the "Jewry Wall," a ruined structure of Roman times said by tradition to be part of a temple of Janus\*, built in the days when Leicester was called Ratae,

The original church now forms only the nave of the present building, for the side walls were pierced by arches in early Norman times, and aisles were added to the north and south, while the chancel at the east end, where now the choir sits, was reconstructed and a tower built above it, and still

\* *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 170.

later the present chancel was added as a further addition at the east end.

Thus to-day the visitor wishing to see the church as it was in Anglo-Saxon times has to pass straight into this nave, and to forget these additional aisles and chancels and the arches leading into them ; and even when he is in the nave he has still to shut from his mind's eye the modern pews and the pulpit.

Having done so, however, he will at once realize that he stands where his forefathers stood 1,200 years ago, for the stark masonry of the walls has no plaster to hide it, and its age is clearly revealed ; while high up in the north wall the two little windows of the original structure are still to be seen, the arches above them being constructed of Roman tiles taken from the ruined temple over the way.

It must have been a small, high-roofed little building, dimly lit and mysterious ; and here, as in nearly all the surviving churches of this remote period, the visitor will be impressed first of all by the gloom and the mystery of the place, as also by its smallness. The clergy of the Seventh Century seem to have desired to foster all that was occult and magical in their religion, and consciously to have erected their churches not altogether as public places of worship but rather as mystic shrines—dark little fanes where the awful sacraments were administered in the ghostly half-light, and the flickering lamps indistinctly illuminated the altar and the awe-inspiring holy relics upon it, throwing up great shadows upon the bare walls, and making unearthly and supernatural the stealthy figures of the priests.



Figure of David from a late Seventh Century Psalter at Durham. *From Rev. D. H. Hughes' History of Durham Cathedral Library.*



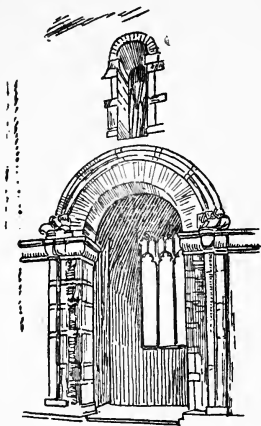
Two Frescoes in Pittington Church, Durham, representing scenes from the life of St. Cuthbert. (p. 226)



Another interesting church is that of St. Lawrence at Pittington, some five miles north-east of Durham. Pittington itself is an uninviting colliery village, but the church stands about a mile to the south, surrounded, it is true, by collieries, yet standing in fairly open country, with only a few cottages and the vicarage in the immediate vicinity. The name is derived either from the Anglo-Saxon word *pynding*, meaning a mill dam, or else from a family called Pitting, or some similar name; and the termination *-ton* is either the usual *tún*, "enclosure" (see Chapter VII) or *dún*, meaning "hill," and having reference to the hill which here rises abruptly from the plain.

The nave of this church is of early Anglo-Saxon date, and the original windows are to be seen; but in Norman times the north wall was pierced by four beautifully decorated, and indeed unique, arches opening into a new aisle, and afterwards other additions were made to the structure.

In the splay of one of the above mentioned windows there still remain two fragments of



Tower Arch in St. Benedict's Church,  
Cambridge.

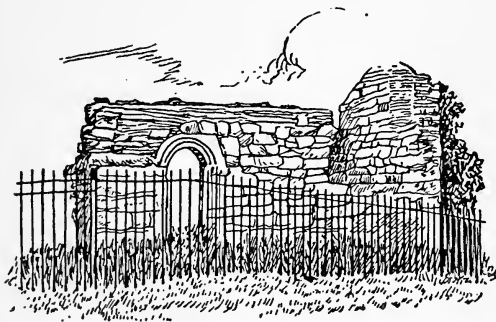
paintings which once covered the walls of the church, and which date from the early years of the Norman conquest. One of these fragments shows St. Cuthbert being consecrated Bishop of Lindisfarne or Holy Island by Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, behind whom stands King Egfrith of Northumbria (671-685). The other fragment represents an incident in Cuthbert's life, when, while sitting at meat with the Abbess Aelfleda at the monastery of "Osingadun" near Whitby, he suddenly turned pale, and dropped the knife he was holding, while his eyes became fixed in a vacant stare. Having regained his senses, he explained that he had had a premonition that a certain shepherd at the monastery had fallen from a tree and had been killed, this vision being followed shortly afterwards by the arrival of a messenger who conveyed the identical news to the Abbess, as we see in the picture.

Although these paintings are slightly later than the epoch with which this book is dealing, they represent incidents which took place in the Seventh Century, and are thus of great interest to the student of this period. There is also an Anglo-Saxon or Danish sundial to be seen here, built into the south wall, outside the church.

In the county of Durham there are several other churches—at Billingham, Hart, Norton, Sockburn, and elsewhere—which are of Anglo-Saxon date, besides that at Escombe, described in Chapter XVIII. In the porch of the church at Sockburn there are some five-and-twenty fragments of stonework of this period to be seen: quite a little museum.



In the church of St. Wystan at Repton, Derbyshire, there is a remarkable crypt beneath the chancel, once part of the abbey built in the Seventh Century. The original outer walls of this crypt still stand, and the vaulting belongs to the reign of Eadgar (959-975) as also do the rough pillars with their spiral decoration. Many of the Mercian royal family were buried in this abbey, including King Wiglaf (827-839), and his grandson Wystan, who was murdered in 850, and afterwards, being canonized, became the patron saint of the church.



St. Patrick's Chapel, Heysham, Lancs.

Heysham, the little Lancashire port, a few miles from Lancaster, possesses some important relics of this period. On the grassy top of the cliffs overlooking the bay stand the wind-swept ruins of the small chapel of St. Patrick, traditionally marking the place where the great Irish saint

came ashore after being shipwrecked in Morecambe Bay. The building probably dates from the Ninth Century, and was perhaps erected by Irish missionaries, who may have named it after St. Patrick in memory of this adventure. It was just a single room not quite thirty feet long and less than ten feet broad, without chancel or porch; but now only parts of the bare walls remain standing. In the wall there is a well-preserved doorway, and this is so distinctly of Anglo-Saxon, not Celtic, workmanship that one would have to regard the church as English rather than Irish, were it not for its name, and for the fact that every Anglo-Saxon church had a chancel or some such addition to the main building, whereas this has none. Just to the west of these ruins there are six empty graves cut in the rock, each shaped to receive a human form, and each having a socket at the head in which a stone cross was probably fixed; but it is an open question whether these tombs belong to the period before or after the Norman conquest.

A short distance to the east stands the parish church, wherein the later additions and restorations have not wholly hidden the original Anglo-Saxon structure, which can be seen in parts of the nave, while at the west end there is a doorway of that period now blocked up. In the churchyard there is part of the shaft of an elaborately sculptured Anglo-Saxon cross, and a Scandinavian hog-back tombstone with rude figures sculptured upon it; while built into the walls of the church there are some fragments of stone carving of this period.

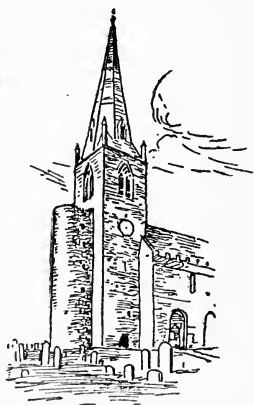
The tower of St. Benedict's Church in Benet

Street, Cambridge, is a good example of late Anglo-Saxon work. In the Cathedral at Oxford, a piece of the wall at the east end of the choir aisle and Lady Chapel seems to be part of the original church built by St. Frideswyde a few years before her death in 739; but as I am dealing here only with the more substantial remains throughout the country, I ought not really to mention this fragmentary piece of masonry, were it not for a personal wish that Oxford should share the honours with her sister university.

At Kirk Hammerton in Yorkshire the original Anglo-Saxon church and tower still exist, though now the former has become only the aisle of a modern building.

The church at Hurley in Berkshire, some four miles north-east of Henley, is largely of Anglo-Saxon date, and at the east end two of the windows of that period still survive. It is said that the sister of Edward the Confessor was buried here, but there are now no traces of her tomb.

Finally, I must find space to mention the church at Brixworth in Northamptonshire, which was built about 680, perhaps on the site of an earlier



The Anglo-Saxon Tower of Brixworth Church, Northants.

church of Roman-British times. The structure was partly rebuilt more than once before Norman times, and in Norman and mediaeval days it assumed its present shape. In the late Anglo-Saxon period a semi-circular turret was added to the west side of the earlier square tower, similar to the turret to be seen at Brigstock in the same county and of the same date ; and it is this feature perhaps, which will first strike the eye of the visitor.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE DANES

*(Ashington in Essex ; Olney in Gloucestershire, etc.).*

IN previous chapters dealing with the Vikings, I explained how their "Grand Army," as it was called, was finally defeated and dispersed, but how, nevertheless, large parts of the Midlands and the eastern side of Britain, north of King Alfred's enlarged Kingdom of Wessex, remained in the hands of Danish settlers. In this chapter I want to show how these Danes and their fellow-countrymen from over the sea ultimately amalgamated with the English.

It must be remembered that these men were closely akin to the Anglo-Saxons in race, speech, and customs, and that when, as was often the case, they were converted to Christianity, they must have been quite as assimilable with the earlier inhabitants as, for example, Scots Highlanders living to-day in England are with the English. Since their Grand Army had been scattered they could not put on airs as conquerors ; nor could they be despised as defeated or abject men, for they had firm hold of their lands.

The two races, in fact, soon began to fraternize, and their upper classes were often so closely connected that in 941, for instance, we find an English Archbishop of York, Wulfstan, upholding

Danish rights, and a Danish Archbishop of Canterbury, Oda, opposing him on behalf of English interests; and twenty years later we hear of King Eadgar of England giving high office to many Danes.

There were times, of course, when the two races clashed. For example in 933, it will be recalled, Constantine, King of the Scots, joined with the Danes in rebellion against King Aethelstan, with the result that the English army marched into Scotland, and drove the rebels back as far as Aberdeen, while the fleet wrought destruction on the Scottish shores as far north as Caithness.

In 937, too, we find the Scots leagued with the British of Strathclyde and the Danes; and this time, as I have already related, Aethelstan inflicted so tremendous a defeat upon them at Brunanburh that for generations the battle was remembered with awe.

But by the beginning of the reign of Aethelred the Redeless (978-1016), which is the period I reached in my last chapter, the Danish settlers had become a recognized part of Britain's population, and were loyal subjects of the English King. They were most thickly settled in the areas around York, Derby, Lincoln, Leicester, Stamford, and Nottingham, and also throughout East Anglia and Essex; and in those regions there is to this day a Danish strain in the blood of the inhabitants almost as strong as the Anglo-Saxon element.

If you look at a map of England you will be able to see the extent of the Danish settlements by noticing the terminations of the place names; for those names are generally Danish which end

in *-by*, meaning "homestead," *-thorpe* or *throp*, "village," *-thwaite*, "grassy slope," *-toft*, "house," *-beck*, "stream," and *-wick*, "creek," this last being the same as the *Vik* in the word Viking. These terminations, however, will also be found on the west coast, but there they indicate the positions of Norse, not Danish, settlements in the earlier days of the Viking incursions.

These Danish place-names seem to radiate inland from the Wash. In Leicestershire, Rutland, Northamptonshire, and Yorkshire, there are more Danish place-names than Anglo-Saxon; while in Lincolnshire there are 300 of them, more than are found in all the rest of England south of the Humber.



Gravestone from Crathorne at Durham.

But Britain was not the only land whereon the Danish Vikings settled permanently. In the year 911 the state of Normandy was established and peopled by a Viking horde under their chieftain Rolf, who there made himself Duke of the Northmen or Normans. His descendants ruled this Viking settlement with increasing power until William, the seventh Duke, invaded England in 1066, and became our King William the First, the Conqueror.

It is not generally realized that William the

Conqueror was thus a pure-blooded Danish Viking, and that his Normans were no other than the descendants of the Vikings of the Grand Army whom the Anglo-Saxons had driven from our shores, and hence were closely related to a large part of the population of England.

I may mention that there are many Danish place-names still to be found in Normandy, and some of those introduced into England by the Normans, and usually regarded as French, are actually Danish. The termination *-ville*, for example, is probably the Teutonic word *weiler*, meaning a "dwelling," for it sometimes has the form *villiers*, and sometimes it is associated with a purely Danish name, as in the case of Haconville (Hakon's House) and Tancarville (Tankar's House). The English termination *-well* is in many cases probably the same word, as in Kettlewell and Bradwell.

After the year 990 the Viking attacks on England began again with great violence; but now they were often directed as much against their own kin settled in England as against the English. Profiting by the notorious weakness of King Aethelred, the Vikings held town after town to ransom. In 991 Ipswich was taken, and the invaders were bought off; and in 993 they sacked Bamburgh, and ravaged the northern coasts.

Then in 994, with nearly 100 ships they attacked London; but, in the absence of King Aethelred—always a ludicrous figure far away from the place where he and his men were needed—the citizens put up so stout a resistance that at last the enemy withdrew.



At this time the Vikings were under the leadership of Sweyn, or Swegen, the exiled King of Denmark; and, being beaten off from London, this chieftain led his men into Sussex and Hampshire, where at length Aethelred bought him off, and he retired to Denmark, there regaining his throne, and also that of Norway.

In 997 and 998 the raids were renewed; and it may be that the English resistance weakened partly because there was a widespread belief that the world would come to an end in the year 1000, which would mean that the invaders, who were regarded as children of the Devil, would then receive the desired punishment without human effort. But the ominous date passed, and in 1001 the Vikings were swarming over the south of England, where many settled down to live under the terms of treaties made with them.

Then in 1002, while the main Viking army was absent, Aethelred, suspecting a revolt, issued orders that all these Danish settlers in the south were to be massacred, and there was an appalling slaughter of them on St. Brice's Day, November 12, in rightful revenge for which King Sweyn returned with a large army, and devastated all Wessex, while the Danish settlers of the north recognized him as their champion.

Things went from bad to worse during the next few years, and the government's muddle and mismanagement brought so many humiliations on the English that they began to think of Sweyn with respect, the result being that at last the ridiculous Aethelred was turned out of the country by his disgusted subjects, and was forced to seek

refuge at the court of Duke Richard of Normandy, whose sister, Emma, he had married. Sweyn at once proclaimed himself King, and all those parts of northern and eastern England where the Danes had been long settled accepted him willingly, and soon the south followed suit without much misgiving, since it did not seem that he had any intention of interfering with English freedom, or of replacing Englishmen by Danes.



Deerhurst Church, Glos. ; the Nave.

Thus England, without a fight in the end, became one kingdom with Denmark and Norway ; but Sweyn only lived a few weeks to rule over the united countries, dying suddenly at Gainsborough in Lincolnshire in February, 1014. He was succeeded by his son Cnut, or Canute, who had an English wife ; but while the new King was away in Denmark, Edmund,

son of the deposed Aethelred, came back, and quickly won the nickname of "Ironside" in his valiant attempt to win the Kingdom.

Cnut soon returned, however, and the stubborn

battle of Ashington, in Essex, six miles north of Southend-on-Sea, was fought between the rivals, the result being a hard-won victory for Cnut, who, a few years later built a memorial church on the spot, where prayers were said alike for the Danish and English dead. This church, called St. Andrew's, still stands at Ashington, though it has been so much altered in mediæval days that Cnut's masonry has to be looked for closely.

After the fight Edmund Ironside retreated across the country to Gloucestershire with Cnut after him ; but the Danes and the English, realizing that Cnut was really desired as King in the North, and that Edmund was equally desired in the South, persuaded the rivals to divide the kingdom along those lines. The two Kings met on the island of Olney amongst the marshes beside the Severn, a place now a meadow close to Deerhurst, a village near Tewkesbury ; and there the pact was made.

But a few weeks later Edmund died suddenly at Oxford at the age of 22, and was buried at Glastonbury, whereupon Cnut was acknowledged King of the whole country, as well as of Denmark, Norway, and now Sweden also. I should explain that Edmund left a son, Edward, who was brought up in Normandy, and whose granddaughter married Henry I of England ; for thus the Norman and Anglo-Saxon royal lines were united, and to this day, in spite of the Danish interruption, the blood of the original English Kings runs in the veins of our royal family.

Meanwhile, however, the Danish Cnut sent his army back to Denmark, agreed at a great assembly

held at Oxford to rule according to English, not Danish, law, and fell so wholly under the spell of England that you would not have known him for a Dane at all; while his Danish subjects and the English were so fully amalgamated that very little difference between them is to be observed. England, of course, was a far richer and more cultured country than Denmark, Sweden, or Norway; and Cnut was inclined to turn to his new subjects rather than to his old in all his difficulties.

He lived most of the time in England, Winchester and London being his capitals; he appointed English bishops to Scandinavian sees; and he made use of English soldiers and generals in his wars in Norway and on the shores of the far-off Baltic. A great northern Empire, centred in England, came into being under his authority; the Danes in England began to speak of themselves as Englishmen; English ships and sailors cruised in Scandinavian waters; and in 1027 we find Cnut at Rome, obtaining privileges for English travellers and pilgrims, and exemption from taxes for English clergy living in Rome, at the same time that he was pushing Danish interests and arranging a favourable adjustment of his Scandinavian frontiers.

Cnut's character was curious. At first he was hot-tempered, and in his fits of passion committed acts of cruel severity of which he was afterwards heartily ashamed; but soon he cultivated greater restraint, and, indeed, considering his violent nature, his self-control was remarkable. He was an emotional, sentimental man, and in a letter he

wrote to his subjects from Rome and in other documents he displays a most earnest desire to be regarded as the father of his people. In 1032 we find him praying at the tomb of his former rival, Edmund Ironside, at Glastonbury, and causing a pall to be made for it of beautiful workmanship, wrought with the hues of the peacock. At Durham he walked five miles with bare feet in honour of St. Cuthbert; and on another such pilgrimage to a saint's tomb he was seen to shed tears and to heave deep sighs. He made grants of land to the Church "for the pardon of his offences," and "the forgiveness of his sins"; and in other ways he shows his eagerness to be regarded as a pious and humble ruler.

He governed wisely and with great understanding of English prejudices, and was beloved by all men; and his death at Shaftesbury in 1035, at the early age of 38, came as a national blow. He was buried in the minster of Winchester, where now the Cathedral stands.

I will make no apology for recording here this sketch of our country's relationship with Denmark, for it is an episode in our history which does not receive proper recognition. Yet its consequences were far reaching, and of these the most important to us is that the Danes who settled in England at this time, or who had been there since the days of the earlier Viking raids, were now absorbed into the English population, with the result that a certain Danish strain passed into Anglo-Saxon blood in all parts of the country, mingling with that of the Romans and British.

In the years to come the Normans were to introduce a further Danish element ; and thus we may speak of our Viking blood as being one of the most powerful ingredients in our strangely diverse composition.







## CHAPTER XXVII

### RELICS OF THE REIGN OF CNUT

*(Olney and Deerhurst in Gloucestershire ; Gloucester ;  
Greenwich in Kent ; Stratfield-Mortimer in Berkshire ;  
Bosham, Selsey and Chichester in Sussex, etc.).*

IN the last chapter I related how, in the year 1016 King Cnut, the Dane, and King Edmund Ironside, the Englishman, met at Deerhurst in Gloucestershire, and divided England between them. They were both chivalrous, high-spirited youths at the time, eager to do the honourable thing ; and though Cnut had just inflicted a crushing defeat on his rival, the latter had had the best of the earlier fighting, and had so won the respect of his opponent that the making of a handsome agreement between them, in which they swore a sort of brotherhood, was a gallant gesture fully to be expected of them.

The meeting-place was called Olney, that is to say the *ey* or isle, of the *aln*, or alder tree, and was then an island amidst the marshes of the Severn Valley, but is now a six-acre meadow known as the "Naight," with the Severn on the one side and a tributary stream on the other. It is close to Deerhurst church, the village of Deerhurst being about four miles by road from Tewkesbury.

For two centuries and more there had been a monastic settlement here, which had been founded in 804 by Aethelric, a Mercian nobleman, who was

ultimately buried within its walls, and which had afterwards become rich and famous. The saintly Aelfheah (Alphege) the Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered by the Danes in 1012, was once a monk here, and afterwards probably abbot ; and, in passing, I think I ought to mention the details of that murder.



The Font, Deerhurst Church, Glos.

A freebooting body of pagan Viking Danes, under their chieftain, Thorkil, attacked and captured Canterbury in 1011, during the weak rule of Aethelred the Redeless, and carried off this most celebrated of the sons of Deerhurst, with other great personages, to be held to ransom. They took them by ship round to their base at Greenwich, and there kept them for many months,

until, on Palm Sunday, 1012, having failed to get the ransom, some of them dragged Aelfheah before their assembly, or *hustings*, (a Danish word still used in our language) and, in the absence of their leader, made him stand a mock trial for having so nobly refused to ask the impoverished members of his flock to raise money for his release.

They had just finished dinner, and, most of them being drunk, they began to pelt the gallant old gentleman with meat-bones from their tables, while presently the more boisterous of the rollicking crew went to the kitchen-spits where the beef had been roasted whole, and collected

heavier missiles such as the hoofs, horns, and thighbones of the oxen, which they then flung at him.

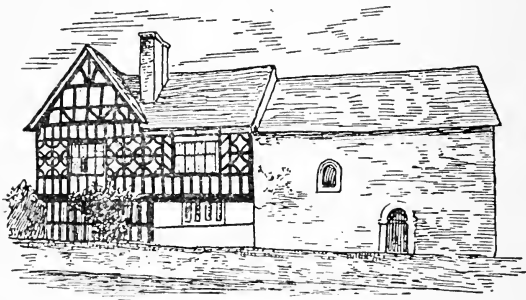
The bestial fun was kept up for some time, but at last a certain captain, a Christian convert, named Thrym, who afterwards became a high official under Cnut, and whose signature you may still see attached to some of the charters of that reign, took pity on the victim, and kind-heartedly put him out of his agonies by splitting his skull with an axe.

Next day, of course, everybody was very sorry, and Thorkil on his return, handed the almost unrecognizable body to the shocked citizens of London, who buried it with great pomp in St. Paul's. Four years later, at the time of the Deerhurst treaty, Cnut probably took the opportunity of paying his respects to the memory of the martyr; and in 1023, when the now venerated bones were removed to Canterbury, he and his Danes united with the English in hailing Aelfheah as a saint and in celebrating the translation of the remains by a most solemn and imposing ceremony.

To-day several churches in England (there are two in London) are named after this whilom abbot of Deerhurst, and in the Prayerbook you will see that his festival is still held on April 19.

The abbey-church at Deerhurst, where once this St. Alphege used to worship, still stands, though a great part of it was rebuilt in the Middle Ages. It is a beautiful building, rising in very stately manner from amidst the dark yews and fir-trees in the trim churchyard; and it is well worth a visit.

From the outside the only part which at once shows itself to be of Anglo-Saxon date is the lower half of the tower, where the "herring-bone" masonry, typical of that age, is to be observed ; and over the door there is a piece of original sculpture, now much defaced.



Odde's Chapel, Deerhurst, Glos.

But, entering the building, the nave is at once seen to be Anglo-Saxon, in spite of the later arches at the sides ; and the west wall has the Ninth Century windows. Originally there was a multangular apse at the east end, of which part of the foundations have been found ; but this, being in ruins, was shut out by the existing east wall when the building was reconstructed, and it is no longer to be seen, though the archway leading into it still stands, blocked up in the present wall.

The Anglo-Saxon font, with its beautiful

decorations, is also to be noticed, and seems to date to a period even earlier than that of the church. The top of it was found in a farmhouse in the village in 1845, and the lower part was discovered in a garden; and the two pieces were put together and replaced in the church about 1870.

A hundred yards to the east of this building there is a little stone chapel built in 1056, that is to say some forty years after the meeting of Cnut and Edmund Ironside, and ten years before the Norman Conquest. It is attached to a Sixteenth Century farmhouse, which is still occupied, and was only identified and separated from it in 1885.

Here, in the adjacent orchard, an inscribed stone was found in 1675, which is now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, but a facsimile of it is to be seen in the chapel. The inscription reads: "Earl Odda caused this regal building to be erected and dedicated in honour of the Holy Trinity for the good of the soul of his brother, Aelfric, which in this place quitted the body. Bishop Aeldred dedicated it on April 12th in the 14th year of the reign of Edward, King of the English," (*i.e.*, Edward the Confessor, whose reign began seven years after the death of Cnut).

Odda and his brother, who was a monk, were related to the English royal house; and Odda himself in the end became a monk, and died at Deerhurst, being buried beside his brother at Pershore, a few months after the dedication of this chapel.

There was a Roman settlement somewhere in the neighbourhood, for there are traces of Roman

materials to be seen in the masonry, and there is a beautiful little terra-cotta head of the ram-horned Jupiter-Ammon, dating from the Third Century, now exhibited in Odda's chapel, it having been found not fifty yards away. Jupiter-Ammon, by the way, was the Romanised form of the ram-horned Egyptian god of Thebes, worshipped by Tutankhamen and the other Pharaohs; and probably there was a sacred grove and shrine dedicated to him here at Deerhurst in Roman days, the memory of which may possibly be preserved in the name of the place, *-hurst* meaning a grove or clearing in the woods, and *deer* or *deór* being a word used for any powerful animal.

Gloucester, from which Deerhurst is but seven miles as the crow flies, is also connected with the reign of Cnut. Here there was a monastery which had been founded in 681 by Osric, who afterwards became King of Northumbria; and when he died in 729 he was buried here. The establishment was deserted in 769, but was refounded over half a century later by King Beornwulf of Mercia in 823.

In 1022 Cnut sternly expelled the whole community for ill-living, and put in Benedictine monks in their place; but the monastery was afterwards burned to the ground, and was re-established in 1058, some 23 years after Cnut's death. The bones of its canonised founder, St. Osric, survived these disasters, and were at last laid to rest in a tomb on the right side of the high altar in the great Cathedral which later rose upon the site; and there you may see it to-day, with its Sixteenth Century effigy of the saint.

In the church at Stratfield Mortimer, Berkshire, close to the ancient Roman-British city of Silchester there is the cover of a stone sarcophagus, inscribed with the name of Aegelpard, son of Kypping, who is perhaps to be identified with Aedelward or Aethelwerd, a Hampshire nobleman and historian mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, who was killed in battle against the Danes in 1001. The inscription is here stated to have been written at the order of Toki, afterwards one of Cnut's important men.

This Aethelwerd wrote a history of Britain in the form of a letter dedicated to his relative Matilda, daughter of Otho the Great, Emperor of Germany, by his first wife Edgitha or Editha, sister of King Aethelstan. This history may now be read in an English translation: it was written in Latin, the author being the only historian to use that language for a long time.

The picturesque little village of Bosham (pronounced Boz'm) near Chichester in Sussex, which stands beside a creek filled by the sea at high tide, is another place having connections with the reign of Cnut. The church here dates from the early Anglo-Saxon age, if not from Roman times. The foundations of a building which may have been a Roman-British basilica-church of the Fourth Century have been found under the existing church; and the bases of the chancel arch are thought by some to be of Roman date.\*

Bishop Wilfred of York and Hexham, of whom I have spoken in a previous chapter, came down to these parts in 681, when he had been turned out

\* *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, p. 218.

of Northumbria, and found here at Bosham a small colony of Irish monks, who, if this church is really as old as is supposed, no doubt were using it as the centre of their mission.

Wildred founded his episcopal church on Selsey Bill, close to Bosham ; and all this part of Sussex came to be of considerable importance in Saxon times. There is a tradition that Cnut had a palace at Bosham ; and a persistent local tradition that he had a daughter who died in childhood, and was buried beside the chancel arch in Bosham church, led the vicar, in 1865, to examine the spot indicated, and, sure enough, he found there a rough and uninscribed stone coffin containing the skeleton of a child.

He caused the spot to be marked, as the visitor may see, by a tile bearing the Danish raven upon it ; but of course it is not certain that the bones were those of Cnut's daughter, or indeed that the King ever had such a daughter, for history does not mention her. Still, the probability is that the tradition was correct ; and a nameless mediaeval effigy of a recumbent female figure now to be seen in the chancel may have been placed there later in memory of the little princess, for the villagers state that so their forefathers have always explained the figure.

The ruins of the Cathedral-church at Selsey now lie beneath the water far out at sea, for the land all around the Bill has been eaten away by the waves ; but fragments of typical decorated stonework of the Anglo-Saxon period have been found at Selsey, and the seal used by the early bishops after the new cathedral had been erected further



inland, at Chichester, seems to have been brought from Selsey, and certainly bears a representation of the earlier building.

In the time of Cnut, the Bishop of Selsey was a certain Aethelric; and we learn from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that this man was so devoted to Aethelnoth, Archbishop of Canterbury, that he prayed God to be allowed to die at the same time that he did. This actually happened, Aethelric dying within a week of his friend; and the two men were buried together in Canterbury Cathedral.

In 1891 some 25 ancient charters were found in a concealed drawer in an old oak table in Chichester Cathedral; and amongst these were documents dating before and after the reign of Cnut. The most important was a charter of the year 780, recording grants made by Oslac, ruler of the South Saxons; and on the back of this deed, King Offa of Mercia gives his approval of the transaction.

There are, of course, several other places, such as Ely and Winchester, closely connected with Cnut; but I have not the space to mention them here. I must not, however, omit a reference to the well-known tale of Cnut's command to the waves of the incoming tide to rise no further. We generally think of this legend as meaning that Cnut, in his vanity, thought that even the waves would obey his behests; but the original tale has an opposite significance. The King, wishing to rebuke his nobles for their flattery, showed them the limitations of his power by demonstrating his inability to control the most ordinary natural events, such as the rising of the tide; and after

pointing to the oncoming waves, he said to them "Vain and trumpery is the power of kings, and indeed nobody is worthy of the name of King except God to whom sky, land and sea are obedient by fixed law." The people of Bosham say that the occurrence took place in that locality; but Southampton, where Cnut sometimes lived, is also claimed as the place, and a public house there, now called "Canute Castle," is stated to mark the exact spot. But this, of course, is fanciful.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE LAST PHASE

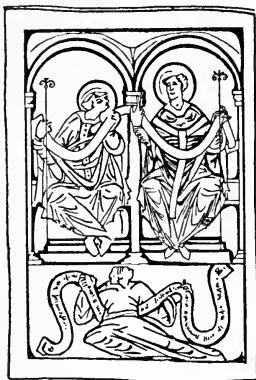
*(Westminster Abbey ; Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire ; and Waltham in Essex).*

THE Danish King Cnut, of whose reign I have written in the last two chapters, was succeeded in 1035, by his son Harold the First, whose mother was an English lady ; but he died at Oxford in 1040, and the crown passed to his half-brother, Harthacnut, the son of Cnut by his later marriage with Emma of Normandy, widow of Aethelred the Redeless, and great-granddaughter of the Viking chieftain Rolf, who was the first Duke of Normandy.

This Harthacnut, a rough, heavy-drinking fellow, half Dane and half Norman, had always regarded his own claim to the throne as better than that of the half-English Harold, and now he spitefully ordered the body of the latter, which had been interred in the old church at Westminster, to be dug up and thrown into the Thames ; but it was afterwards recovered secretly and buried either at St. Clement's in the Strand, or at St. Olaf's, Southwark.

He died, however, two years later, in 1042, having had a stroke while drinking at a marriage-feast ; and thereupon his half-brother, Edward, came to the throne, he being son of the late

Aethelred the Redeless and of the above-mentioned Enma whose second husband was Cnut. The new King was the third English sovereign of the name of Edward, and ought by rights to be styled Edward the Third, but he has been known too long as "Edward the Confessor" for an alteration now to be made which, as I said in a previous chapter, would turn our late Edward the Seventh into Edward the Tenth.



Figures from a Tenth Century Hymnarium at Durham.

He was born at Islip, then called *Githslepe*, some seven miles north of Oxford, where his father had a palace reputed to have stood just to the north-east of the parish church, but of which no trace now remains. The font of this church is now preserved at Middleton Stoney, and in the Middle Ages, the royal child was said to have been baptised in it, an inscription being engraved upon it to this

effect; but actually the font dates from long after the Norman Conquest.

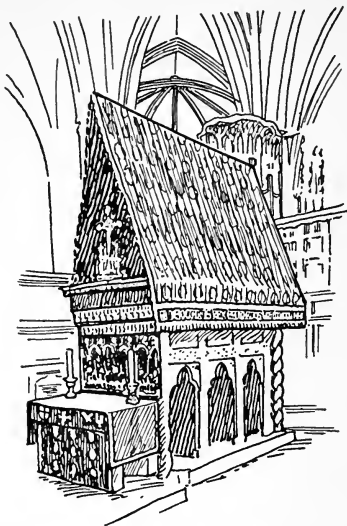
He was brought up at the court of his uncle, Duke Richard of Normandy, and though an Englishman on his father's side, he preferred his mother's people, and was wholly Norman in

character. He made a political marriage to Edith, daughter of the great Godwine, Earl of Wessex and of his wife Gytha, sister or cousin of Cnut; but, having vowed himself to actual celibacy, he had no children.

The King was more monk than ruler, and seems to have left affairs of state in the hands of the three great earls, Godwine, Siward, and Leofric, the last named being husband of the celebrated Lady Godiva, whose adventures in the nude are apparently pure fiction. A number of Normans were given high office in England; and William, Duke of Normandy, who afterwards became the famous "Conqueror," came over to stay with the English King, his cousin, and stated later that Edward had promised to make him his heir, which was probably true, since Edward had no child to succeed him, and all his sympathies were directed towards Normandy.

Edward's most memorable work was the building of the great church which was the parent of the present Westminster Abbey. The site was then known as Thorney, or the Isle of Thorns, and was surrounded by marshy land. Tradition says that in Roman times there was here a temple of Apollo, and some Roman remains have been found near the Abbey, including a coffin inscribed with the name of a certain Valerius Amandinus. Tradition also states that a church was built here in the early years of the Anglo-Saxon epoch; and there is evidence that in 785 King Offa of Mercia made certain grants of land to the monastery which had grown up around this church. This monastery was rebuilt by Dunstan, of whom I

have written in a previous chapter ; and Edward the Confessor erected his new abbey just to the east of these earlier buildings.



The Shrine of Edward the Confessor, Westminster Abbey

The church was about 260 feet in length, and was cruciform in shape, having a semi-circular apse at the east end. It was consecrated a few days before the death of Edward the Confessor, who was buried there on the feast of the Epiphany, January 6th, 1066. A century later he was canonised as a saint, and his coffin was placed in

a splendid shrine ; but later, when the present abbey was built, the coffin was again moved to a new shrine, which you may still see, and which still contains his bones. Beneath the pavement in front of the high altar now in use there are some remains of the Confessor's church, but otherwise nothing is left of it, the whole edifice having been pulled down when the abbey we know to-day was built.

On Edward the Confessor's death, the crown passed by election to Harold, who, being son of the great English earl, Godwine, and of his Danish wife, and consequently brother-in-law of the Confessor and nephew or cousin of Cnut, was the personification of the final union between the English and the Danes in England. Three years earlier, however, this Harold the Second had given a promise to William of Normandy to support the latter's claim to the English throne as cousin and chosen heir of Edward, and now William demanded that the promise should be honoured, to which Harold replied that it was not valid, since it had been obtained from him under great pressure as the price of his freedom when he had fallen into William's hands and had been held to ransom.

Thereat William declared that he would come over and fight for his rights ; and meanwhile he laid his case before the Pope, reminding the Pontiff that England, owing to the independence of the English character, had always been a difficult province to manage, and that just recently the Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert of Jumièges, appointed by Edward the Confessor

had been expelled. William assured him, however, that if he were successful, he would bring the English church under full obedience to Rome. The Pope highly approved of these sentiments, declared William's proposed campaign to be a holy war, and gave it his blessing, sending a sacred banner to Normandy to be carried at the head of the invading army.

The attitude of the Pope is not to be wondered at, for the English church dignitaries had certainly flouted the Papal authority on many occasions. We have seen how King Ecgrith refused to obey the Pope's order to him to reinstate Bishop Wilfred ; and how Dunstan would not recognize another Papal decree. Somewhere about the year 1000, too, a certain abbot Aelfric wrote a number of homilies, very popular in England, one of which denounced the Roman attitude towards the Eucharist, and another put forward views in regard to St. Peter which were not in accord with those of Rome. It would be too much, of course, to say that the country was yet showing any signs of secession ; but there was undoubtedly a tendency to claim that right of independent action which ultimately brought us our own church.

William's army was drawn from several different quarters. During the Fifth and Sixth Centuries many of the Britons, turned out of their lands by the Anglo-Saxon invaders, had gone across the sea to north-western France, and had there expanded a small, earlier British colony of Roman times into a great settlement which gave its name to the later Brittany. These expatriated Britons were presently absorbed into the new Viking



realm of Normandy; and now William drew heavily upon them for service in his coming English campaign.

These and his own Northmen, or Normans, the descendants of the original Danish or Viking settlers, probably supplied a majority in his mixed army; but various adventurous barons from the neighbouring Frankish provinces also joined in with their men, thus giving something of a French flavour to the hotchpotch.

The presence of this French element, and the fact that the Normans had adopted the language and many of the customs of the Franks, has led us to think of William's army as French. But actually, as I say, the majority consisted of Normans, that is to say Danish Vikings, and British colonists from Brittany; and, in view of the quantity of Danish and British blood then running in Anglo-Saxon veins, we should rather regard the troops as being for the most part the close kin of those they were about to attack.

But while William was making his preparations in Normandy, another pretender to the English throne landed on our shores, namely Harold Hardrada, King of Norway, an adventurous warrior who had fought in many parts of the world and for some time had commanded the Varangian Guards at Constantinople.

He came over with 300 ships, and after sacking Scarborough on the Yorkshire coast, sailed up the Humber, marched inland, and defeated the defending Anglo-Danish troops at Fulford, two miles south of York. But, five days later, Harold, the new King of England, arrived on the scene

with his English forces ; derisively offered his enemy " seven feet of English soil," to serve him for a grave ; and on September 25, brought him to battle at Stamford Bridge on the Derwent, seven miles east of York, and was completely victorious.

The King of Norway, his generals, and nine-tenths of his entire army, were left dead upon the field ; and the remainder, which surrendered, required only twenty-four out of their 300 vessels to take them back across the sea. It was one of the greatest of England's victories ; and it was so long remembered that to this day the meadow where the fight took place is called Battle Flats.

On September 28, three days after this tremendous English success in the north, the army of William of Normandy landed in the south, at Pevensey in Sussex, having come over, perhaps some 15,000 or 20,000 strong, in 694 ships. He then marched fourteen miles along the coast to Hastings, and there dug himself in.

King Harold, up in Yorkshire, received the news a few days later, and immediately marched southwards. On his way he paused at Waltham in Essex, where, during the reign of Edward the Confessor, he had spent much time and money on beautifying and enlarging the abbey-church. In this building there stood an ancient and miraculous cross, perhaps of Roman date, which had been found at Montacute in Somerset, and had been brought to Waltham by the founder of the church.

Here before the altar Harold made his supplication for victory in the coming fight, and afterwards lay for a long time prone upon his face at the foot

of this cross. Nothing recognizable now remains of this building, for the later abbey which replaced it is in ruins, and the church, though it has survived and is still in use, has been rebuilt out of all semblance to its original self ; but the present nave occupied the same site, and the visitor to it cannot but be impressed by the thought that here the last King of the Anglo-Saxon epoch, in the agony of his hope and fear, made his last prayer before going to his death.

I will not here tell the story of the battle, fought on the open ground at Senlac, near Hastings, where now stand the remains of Battle Abbey. All day victory hung in the balance, but at last fortune favoured the invaders ; Harold was killed, and all the English and Danish regular troops, including every single nobleman present, refusing to surrender, died where they stood around the corpse of their King.

It was a complete slaughter of the flower of the nation, and it left hundreds of estates vacant to be seized by the newcomers. I may repeat, however, that with the exception of William's French allies, the Norman lords of England were of Danish or British origin, and can hardly be said to have introduced a very marked new strain into our blood.

England was still England ; and the fact that the Anglo-Saxon language and customs ultimately prevailed, proves beyond question that the new element was absorbed into the old without any very appreciable change. In 1258, less than two centuries after the conquest, a proclamation was issued to the Barons in English, because they

could no longer understand French ; and as many of the men thus addressed must have been advanced in years, the inference is that their fathers, who had preferred to have them taught English, were themselves dropping the use of French already before 1200. There was no wholesale migration of the Norman nation into Britain in any way to be compared with the immigration of the Anglo-Saxon peoples in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries ; and very few Norman place-names are to be found on the map. Indeed, two or three generations after the Conquest the population of the British Isles must have been racially much the same as it was two or three generations before that event, except that some of the ruling families were of French stock, and a small amount of French blood had passed into the veins of the people living round about the main Norman centres. The rest of the newcomers, as I say, were pure Norman (i.e. Danish) or Breton (i.e. British) and only brought in strains already existing in our blood.

William was accepted as King by the English not as their conqueror but as the legal heir of Edward the Confessor, his cousin, and as one who, in fair fight, had defeated and slain his rival Harold ; and he was crowned by the English clergy beside the Confessor's grave. The battle of Hastings was regarded as a dynastic fight between two claimants to the English throne, and not as a national disaster ; and soon the English troops were fighting William's battles on the Continent side by side with the Norman troops.

The Anglo-Saxon, or English, royal line did not

die out. Edmund Ironside, son of the deposed Aethelred the Redeless, had left a son, Edward, who had lived abroad, and had been survived by his two children Edgar and Margaret. Edgar died childless, but Margaret married King Malcolm of Scotland, and their daughter married Henry the First of England, son of William the Conqueror.

Meanwhile, the Conqueror had married Matilda of Flanders, who was sixth in descent from Alfred the Great; and thus the blood of the Anglo-Saxon Kings was handed on to the future royal house of England. The Conqueror's descendants were proud of their Anglo-Saxon blood, and in a charter of Richard the Second that King refers with deference to "the Lord Aethelstan, formerly King of England, and our Ancestor"; but in more recent times there has been a tendency to forget this ancient and honourable lineage, and few are now aware that our present King George V is 27th in descent from the above-mentioned Margaret the last Anglo-Saxon princess, and 34th in descent from Alfred the Great.



Part of a Cross-shaft, Durham.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### MANUSCRIPTS, COINS AND OTHER REMAINS

*(London ; Downton in Wiltshire ; Richard's Castle in Shropshire, etc.).*

CONSIDERING the chances and hazards of life in the ages that are gone it must be a matter for astonishment that so many documents and manuscripts have come down intact to us from Anglo-Saxon times. Surviving hoards of coins are not to be wondered at, for they were buried and hidden, and the earth has been their safeguard; nor are the discoveries of jewellery and other metal objects surprising, for generally they represent funeral-deposits preserved in graves beneath the ground.

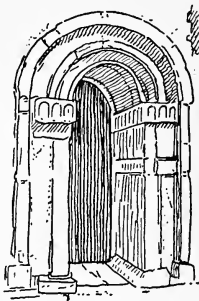
But documents, in themselves frail and inflammable, have had no safe keeping such as mother earth could afford: they have been consigned to the precarious care of mortal men prone to the accidents of life, and have been kept in cupboards and chests, moved from place to place, handled, mishandled, and exposed to the jeopardy of employment, or left to the peril of disuse.

Yet to-day you may see many charters, deeds, and other documents written by scribes who have been dead over a thousand years, and you may examine the actual signatures of kings and great

men who wrote them generations before the Normans were ever heard of.

At Canterbury there are twenty-five such deeds, dating between 742 and 1049, two of them belonging to the reign of Offa of Mercia, dated 788 and 790 ; one of the reign of Alfred, dated 898 ; and one of the time of Cnut, 1023, in which the pious King states that with his own hands he had placed his "kingly helm" on the altar of the cathedral church.

At Westminster there is a charter of King Aethelred of Mercia, dated 693, regarding a grant of land at Battersea ; another of Offa, 785, this being witnessed by that king and his queen ; and many more. At Exeter there are several charters dating from the reign of Aethelstan down to the Conquest. At Winchester there is one of the time of Aethelwulf, dated 854, and another written in



Tower Doorway, Earl's Barton,  
Northamptonshire.

957 in the reign of Eadwig. At Wells, Worcester, Chichester, and elsewhere, there are several such documents ; while yet others are to be seen in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the Record Office and British Museum in London, and so on.

In the British Museum there are many manuscripts of this period ; and here you may see some of Alfred's own writings, and also his will, penned

over a thousand years ago. In this collection also is a copy, dating from about the year 1000, of the famous epic poem called *Beowulf*, composed before the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain, which is the oldest poem of any length in the language. Here, too, there are Bede's *History*, written in the Eighth Century, of which, astonishing to relate, there are more than 130 manuscript copies still in existence; the great *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* begun by Alfred and continued by his successors; the *Laws* of Cnut and other kings who lived in the Anglo-Saxon period; a Latin Psalter of the Eighth Century, with an interlinear translation in Anglo-Saxon; and many other church books of the period.

Many hoards of Anglo-Saxon coins have been found in various parts of the country. In the British Museum you may see a beautiful silver chalice, found with other gold and silver objects and over one hundred silver coins at St. Austell in Cornwall; a bronze bucket from Hexham, Northumberland, which contained 8,000 coins; a splendidly decorated silver-gilt cup from Halton Moor, Lancashire, which contained 860 silver coins and some pieces of stamped gold.

For my London readers I may specially mention that a hoard of 7,000 coins of late Anglo-Saxon date was found in the City; another hoard of 400 coins was unearthed near St. Mary-at-Hill; and yet another of 241 coins was discovered near Fleet Street.

A large collection of Anglo-Saxon coins is to be seen in the British Museum, and there are collections also in many of the local museums



throughout the country. The earliest known coins of this epoch are small pieces of gold or silver known as *sceattas*, the word *sceat* meaning "treasure"; they date from about 600 A.D., and the designs upon them are copied from those on the latest coins of the Roman age used in Britain. Many hoards of Anglo-Saxon coins of the period of the Danish invasions have been found in Scandinavia, these representing the money paid to the raiders to buy them off, a practice often resorted to at the time when England was distracted and unable to meet the Danes in battle with any hope of success.

Our pound, shilling, and penny all appear in the Anglo-Saxon coinage, with other units which I need not mention. The pound, then called *pund* from the Latin *pondus*, "a weight," was equal, as it is now, to 240 pennies, but the penny had a much higher purchasing value, of course, than it has in later times. The word penny is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *pending* or *penig*, which, again, is derived from the Latin *pannus*, meaning a strip of cloth, that being an article of barter in early times. The shilling, derived from *scilling*, "a division," varied from forty-eight to sixty to the pound, and did not fall to the ratio of twenty to the pound until much later.

Apart from the jewellery and other articles found in early Anglo-Saxon graves, to which I have referred in previous chapters, there are a great many objects of the later years of this period brought to light by chance discoveries. Many of these are in the British Museum; and here I may mention a sword of most beautifully worked

silver, found in Fetter Lane, London; another sword handle decorated with filigree-work in gold and set with garnets, discovered in Cumberland; many gold finger-rings, including one belonging to Alfred's father, King Aethelwulf, found at Laverstock, Wiltshire, and another once the property of Alfred's sister.



A Bone Comb from Lincoln.

London has provided a good many objects of various kinds, which have been discovered accidentally during digging operations undertaken for the

purpose of laying drains, foundations, and so forth. These include swords, spears, pieces of jewellery, and the like, which are now exhibited in the British Museum; and here, also, you may see several combs, some in neat little cases, one of which was found in Threadneedle Street. I may mention also a bronze model of a gravestone found in the Thames at Hammersmith.

The metropolis, I may, however, mention in passing, is disappointing in regard to existing stone structures of this period; and though a decorated tombstone from St. Paul's Churchyard, the head of a cross from St. John's-upon-Walbrook, and a few other such pieces from Anglo-Saxon times, are known, hardly any building-work survives.

In the previous chapters I have spoken of the many remains of the Anglo-Saxon epoch to be seen throughout the country—crosses, tombstones, and actual masonry buildings; and here, in con-

clusion, I may mention briefly one or two sites of interest.

In the grounds of a house in the village of Downton in Wiltshire, some seven miles south of Salisbury, there is a mound probably thrown up in ancient British times. It is called the Moot, and it seems to have been used in Anglo-Saxon days as the meeting-place of the shire-mót or County Council of the period. We still use this word *moot*, by the way, in its meaning of council or debate, as when we speak of a "moot-point," that is to say a point to be discussed; and the word "meeting" comes from the same word.

Finally I must mention Richard's Castle, some three and a half miles from Ludlow in Shropshire. This is the only masonry castle definitely recognized as Anglo-Saxon in all England. There are many earthworks and mounds, of course, still existing which appear to have been strongholds of this period, and I have hinted elsewhere that certain Norman Castles may possibly contain pre-Conquest stonework; but here at Richard's Castle you may see the remaining traces of an actual fortress built before the time of William the Conqueror, and though little of the masonry now exists, the walls and towers were still standing in the Middle Ages.

The castle was built by Richard Fitz-Scrube, a Norman who had been



Bronze Model  
of Gravestone  
from the Thames  
at Hammer-  
smith.

given high office by Edward the Confessor, and who is said to have done his best to help William to gain the throne. He erected his walls upon a mound some sixty feet high ; and the existing earthworks and fortifications are well preserved.

## CHAPTER XXX

### ANGLO-SAXON HISTORY

**T**HE first King of all England was Edward the Elder, of whom I have written in Chapter XXIII. Previous to his time, it will be remembered, there had been five main Kingdoms in England, namely Kent, East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria, and Wessex; and it may be useful to give here the lists of the sovereigns of these realms,\* from the point at which their dating becomes certain.

The Kings of Kent are as follows :

Aethelbert . . . 560—616	Eadbald . . . 616—640	Eadbert . . . 796—798
Earconbert . . . 640—664	Ecgbert . . . 664—673	Cuthred . . . 798—805
Lothere . . . 673—685	Eadric . . . 685—686	Baldred . . . 805—823
Followed by a confused period.		Ecgbert, also of Wessex 825
Wihtraed . . . 694—725		Aethelwulf, also of Wessex 825—839
Eadbald . . . 725—748		Aethelstan . . . 839—850
Aethelbert . . . 748—762		Aethelwulf, . . . 856—858 again.
Several petty Kings . . . 762—796		Aethelbert . . . 858—860
		In 860 Kent and Wessex were finally united

The Kings of East Anglia are as follows :

Raedwald . . . 593—617	Aethelhere . . . 654—655
Eorpwald . . . 617—628	Aethelwald . . . 655—664
Sigebert . . . 631—634	Eadwulf . . . 644—713
Egrice . . . 634—635	Aelfwald . . . 713—749
Anna . . . 635—654	Beorna . . . 749— ?

\* I have followed the lists given at the end of Sir Charles Oman's *England before the Norman Conquest*.

Aethelbert . . ? —793	Athelstan . . 829—839?
After whom East Ang-	Aethelweard . 839—852?
lia was united with	Beorhtric . . 852—856?
Mercia until 823.	Edmund . . . 856—870
Eadwald . . 823—829?	

Edmund was murdered by the Danes in 870, as recorded in Chapter XXI, and afterwards there were three Danish Kings of East Anglia :

Guthrum . . 878—890	Guthrum . . 902—916?
Eohric . . . 890—902	

The Kings of Mercia are the following :

Creoda . . . ? —593?	Offa . . . . 757—796
Pybba . . . 593—606?	Ecgerth . . . 796
Cearl . . . 606—626?	Coenwulf . . 796—821
Penda . . . 626—655	Coelwulf . . 821—823
Peada . . . 655—656	Beornwulf . . 823—825
After whom the North-	Ludican . . . 825—827
umbrian Oswy reigned	Wiglaf . . . 827—829
until 659.	After whom Ecgbert
Wulfhere . . 659—675	of Wessex held Mercia
Aethelred . . 675—704	for a year.
Coenred . . . 704—709	Wiglaf, again . 830—839
Coelred . . . 709—716	Beorhtwulf . . 839—852
Aethelbald . . 716—757	Burhred . . . 852—874
Beornred . . . 757	Ceolwulf . . . 874

The Kingdom of Northumbria was at first divided into two realms, Bernicia and Deira. The Kings of Bernicia are as follows :

Ida . . . . 547—559	Eanfrith . . 633—634
Sons of Ida . 559—586	Oswald, also
Aethelric . . 586—593	of Deira . . 634—642
Aethelfrith . 593—617	Oswy . . . . 642—655
Edwin, also	In 655 Oswy united
King of Deira 617—633	the two realms.

The Kings of Deira are as follows :

Aella . . . 560—588	Oswald, also
Aethelric, also	of Bernicia 634—642
of Bernicia 588—593	Oswin . . . 644—651
Aethelfrith, also	Aethelwald . 651—655
of Bernicia 593—617	In 655 Deira was
Edwin . . . 617—633	united with Bernicia.
Osric . . . 633—634	

The Kings of all Northumbria after this are :

Oswy . . . 655—671	Osred . . . 788—790
Ecgrith . . 671—685	Aethelred,
Aldfrid . . . 685—705	again . . . 790—796
Eardwulf . . 705	Osbold . . . 796
Osred . . . 705—716	Eardwulf . . 796—806
Coenred . . . 716—718	Aelfwald . . . 806—808
Osric . . . 718—729	Eardwulf,
Ceolwulf . . 729—737	again . . . 808—810
Eadbert . . . 737—758	Eanred . . . 810—840
Oswulf . . . 758—759	Aethelred . . 840—844
Aethelwald Mull	Redwulf . . . 844
759—765	Aethelred,
Alchred . . . 765—774	again . . . 844—848
Aethelred . . 774—779	Osbeorht . . 848—867
Aelfwald . . . 779—788	Aella . . . 861—867

After this there were several Danish Kings who ruled at York. These are :

Halfdene . . 876—877	Regnald . . . 918—921?
Guthred-Cnut 833—894	Sihtric Caoc 921—926
Siefred . . . 893—896	After whom Aethel-
After whom this part	stan of Wessex ruled
of the country passed	till 939.
into the hands of	Anlaf . . . 940—942
Aethelwald of the	Anlaf . . . 942—944
royal house from 900	After whom Edmund
to 902, a period of	and Eadred of Wes-
confusion following.	sex ruled till 947.

Eric . . .	947—948	After whom the Kings of the House of Wessex ruled the whole country.
Anlaf, again.	949—952	
Eric, again .	952—954	

The Kings of Wessex are as follows :

Ceawlin . .	560—592	Ceadwalla .	685—688
Ceolric . .	592—597	Ine . . .	688—726
Ceolwulf .	597—611	Aethelheard.	726—740
Cynegils .	611—643	Cuthred . .	740—756
Coenwalch .	643—645	Sigebert . .	756—757
After whom there was a period of con- fusion till 648.		Cynewulf . .	757—786
Coenwalch,		Beorhtric . .	786—802
again . .	648—672	Ecgbert . .	802—839
Seaxburh,		Aethelwulf .	839—858
Queen . .	672—674?	Aethelbald .	858—860
Aescwine .	674—676?	Aethelbert .	860—866
Centwine .	676—685?	Aethelred . .	866—871
		Alfred . . .	871—900

The next King of Wessex was Edward the Elder, and he is generally reckoned as the first real King of all England, though his predecessors as far back as Ecgbert had claimed, but had been unable to enforce, a sovereignty over the whole country. He and his successors, English and Danish, are as follows :

Edward the Elder . .	900—924	(Sweyn . .	1014)
Aethelstan	924—939	Edmund	
Edmund . .	939—946	Ironside	1016
Eadred . .	946—955	Cnut . . .	1016—1035
Eadwig . .	955—959	Harold . .	1033—1040
Eadgar . .	959—975	Harthacnut	1040—1042
Edward the Martyr . .	975—978	Edward the Confessor	1042—1066
Aethelred the Redeless	978—1016	Harold . .	1066
		William the Conqueror	1066



In view of these long and precise lists of kings, and in view of the wealth of historical and archaeological material which illuminates the period covered by their reigns, and of which the foregoing chapters have provided a very slight sketch, it is a matter for astonishment that we have come to think of the detailed history of our country as beginning with the reign of William the Conqueror, and the ages before 1066 as too obscure to be bothered about.

In my previous book, *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, I showed that the chronicle of our history, as a more or less continuous, intelligible, and exact record of events, begins about half a century before the birth of Christ, that is to say at the time when Julius Caesar was the chief figure in Rome, Ptolemy Auletes was Pharaoh of Egypt, and the glories of the ancient world were still at their height. I showed there that the story of Britain was thus linked like a continuous chain with that of the remote civilization which the spade of the excavator is now bringing to light amid such popular acclamation ; and in this present volume I have tried to demonstrate the fact that this tale maintains its detailed course through the Anglo-Saxon period, full of interesting and romantic matter, rich in recorded events, and never once falling back into the darkness and vacancy of an unchronicled epoch wherein personalities and movements are wanting.

That darkness, that vacancy, is to be found in our modern minds, not in the pages of our ancient history ; but surely the time has now come when the national value of long records is to be appreciated. You cannot judge a nation by studying

only one section of its history : you must see its whole life spread before you ; and rather than that the youth of to-day should learn to understand only the latest phase of the nation's story, it were preferable that he should smite his brow and declare himself utterly defeated by the vastness of the lesson he is set—for so, at least, he would apprehend its most stupendous feature, namely the continuity and the length of the road his fathers have trodden with such varied gait and yet with such singleness of purpose.

That road passes back and ever back to the far horizon, until the eyesight fails and the mind is awed at the sheer extent of it ; yet it is always the same straight highroad in all its different settings and landscapes, and the crowds upon it, viewed in the mass, move forward in the same traditional spirit of goodwill, toleration, and compromise which are the historic characteristics of our age-old race. From incalculable distance, augmented by innumerable strains of type and breed, the British people come thronging along this immeasurable way, pressing forward towards the vision of the future, generation succeeding generation, moving from strength to strength, until the Past merges into the Present and we of to-day see ourselves inseparably part of the progression, part of old England, part of Britain that was, and is, and is to be.

THE END

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